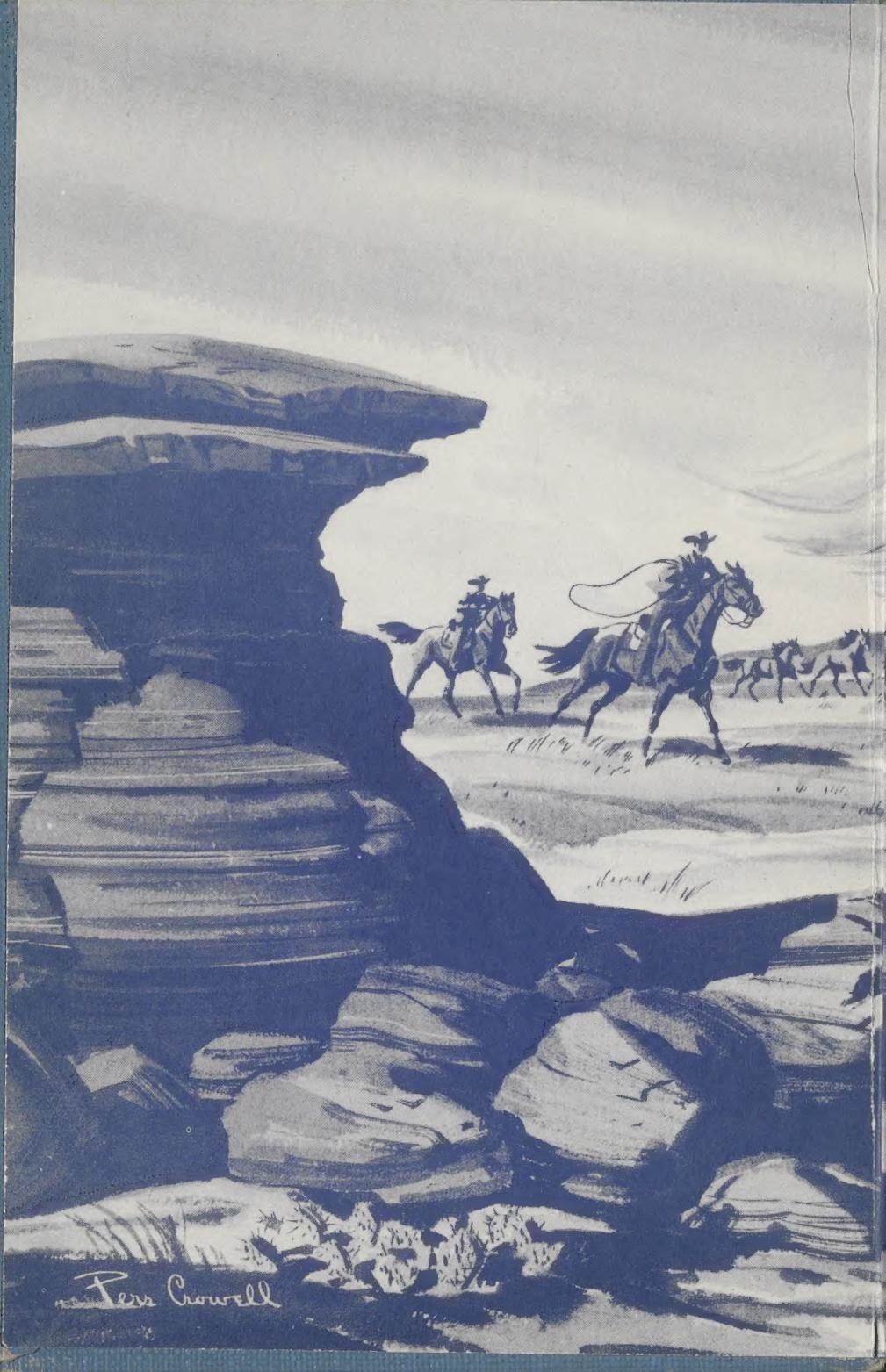


The Ghost Mare





Pete Crowell





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THE GHOST MARE

by David Grew



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DAVID GREW

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
I Springtime	3
II Billy Breaks the News	33
III A Real Friend	48
IV Trouble	56
V Superstition	82
VI A Threat	97
VII Wisdom and Wildness	122
VIII Riding the Wild Mare	136
IX Lady Lightning Christened	160
X Rayner Immovable	171
XI A Summons	185
XII Reciprocation	200
XIII The Ghost Mare Comes Back	207
XIV Lady Lightning Triumphs	234

The Ghost Mare



CHAPTER 1

Springtime

THE great dome of sky arched over the Alberta prairies, blue and clear as crystal. Most of the melted-snow wetness of spring had already soaked into the ground, and soft green grass blades had begun pushing their way up. The unobstructed expanse of earth radiated with newness.

It was the last day of school. The little one-room schoolhouse stood up out of the plains like a mushroom. A Canadian flag fluttered from a stick nailed to the peak of the roof. Two hundred feet back of it squatted a small sod barn, its uncertain walls sagging noticeably.

The barbed-wire fence enclosing the schoolyard cut a tiny, insignificant oblong out of the prairie disk, which was in turn fenced in by a perfectly circular horizon.

Except for the noise of laughter and shouting that came out of the small building, the place appeared abandoned. A wagon on one side and a gig on the other looked as lifeless as only wagons without horses hitched to them can look. There was no sign of life outdoors other than the occasional swishing of a horse's tail in the deep shadow of the cavelike opening into the barn.

While automobiles, trucks, and busses had been used on the paved highways for weeks, the dirt roads in this sparsely settled country were not good risks for motor vehicles. Here the farmers depended on horses most of the year.

Suddenly the schoolhouse door burst open, and half a dozen children from six to twelve broke through the long vestibule or woodshed and came out upon the platform before the door. Some of them came shouting, just to be shouting; others expressed their excitement by waving the bags of candy the teacher had given them as a parting gift. Living as far from town as they did, it was not every day they could get candy.

As these smaller children spread over the yard, the two biggest boys appeared in the doorway, one of them talking earnestly.

"Let's you an' I ride down to the badlands, Billy," he said. "See if the Mounties are out yet to get the ghost mare."

This was Tom Rayner, a dark-haired, lively boy of sixteen, nearly six feet tall, his dark brown eyes afire with eagerness. He was looking anxiously into the less excited face of Billy Thornton. Billy was also sixteen and as interested in the prospects of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police coming to "get" the ghost mare, but he wasn't in the habit of showing his feelings as readily as Tom.

Although the two boys had been almost inseparable from their earliest childhood, there had always been noticeable between them a restrained sort of rivalry. Billy was half an inch taller. Tom had accepted that fact as one accepts the weather, because there is little

one can do about it. He did sometimes try to stretch himself to Billy's height, but he realized that it got him nowhere. Worse yet, Billy was almost five pounds heavier than Tom. Whenever they weighed themselves, and Tom managed to raise the scales an ounce, Billy would laughingly accuse him of having stones in his pocket.

The fact that Billy was brighter than Tom in his school work would have caused more ill-will between them than it did, if it weren't that Ina, Tom's sister, got much better grades in all their tests than either one of them.

The thing that rankled in Tom's heart the most, however, was Billy's being a far better horseman than he. No matter how hard Tom trained his ponies each year, Billy always beat him in county fair races; and no matter how diligently he practiced lassoing, Billy was always able to outdo him in swinging the lariat.

"I don't think the Mounties are out yet," said Billy, answering Tom, as if his mind were on something else.

He turned around quickly as he spoke, as though he had eyes in the back of his head and had seen Ina coming. A faint flush of gladness came into his face, but his eyes shifted slightly with embarrassment. He noticed that Tom was watching him.

Ina was smiling back at Billy. Little Agnes Steele was hanging on her arm with girlish affection. Agnes was only twelve.

"When did your father write to the Mounties, Agnes?" asked Tom.

"Oh, I don't know," said Agnes, making a face as if she were annoyed. She was heavyhearted because this

was the last day of school. Prairie children have little companionship when school is not in session, and Agnes was an only child in her home.

"What do you think the Mounties will do to the white mare?" asked Ina anxiously, walking over toward Billy.

Although she was a year younger than Tom, Ina appeared much more mature than her brother. She was almost as tall as he, and while she weighed three pounds less than Tom, she appeared more robust. Her face glowed with health. Her light brown eyes glistened and seemed to reflect light like water, and she had a way of tossing her mass of golden curls which always appealed to Billy. She had the grace in her movements that farm girls often acquire from horseback riding, from leaping into saddles and racing wildly over the plains.

"What will they do with her?" demanded Tom, repeating Ina's question, but it was evident that he didn't have the faintest idea.

"Let's all three of us ride down to the badlands," said Billy with an enthusiasm he hadn't shown when Tom had asked him to do that. "It's the last day of school. Only one o'clock!"

"Oh, good!" cried Ina, but her brother Tom scowled.

Without a word he jumped off the platform and walked away to the barn by himself. Billy, taken aback, looked after him; then he turned and looked at Ina. Ina smiled and shook her head.

By that time the schoolyard was astir with running children. Three horses had been brought out of the barn, two were being hitched to the wagon, and one to

the gig. Four youngsters were climbing into the wagon seat, and two were jumping around the gig.

"I'll get your pony, Ina," said Billy.

He hurried on after Tom. By the time he got to the barn doorway, Tom was coming out with his saddle pony. Billy looked right at him, but Tom, still scowling, looked off to the side as if to avoid Billy. Billy resented the childish way Tom was behaving.

He saddled the two ponies leisurely. "Let him go off by himself if he's a mind to," he muttered. But as he pulled the saddle cinch tight, he began to feel a bit sorry. He had of recent months, since he had become so strongly attached to Ina, been neglecting Tom somewhat. He and Tom had been playmates as far back as he could remember. While he had always been annoyed by Tom's flashes of bad temper, he had never ceased to regard him as his lifelong friend. He was sure he was treating Tom as well as always, but Tom resented his interest in Ina. Tom wanted Billy to go off alone with him, as they used to when they were younger. But Billy didn't understand why they couldn't all three go together.

Ina took the reins of her pony from him when he led the ponies out into the yard. Billy could see that Ina, too, was disappointed in Tom's behavior.

"Tom's real mad," he said as he helped Ina into the saddle.

"He's always mad lately," said Ina. "He'll have to get over it. He's used to having his own way too much."

"Your Dad kind o' spoils him, doesn't he?" ventured Billy, smiling, glad that Ina was taking it the way she was.

"He's a whole lot like Dad," said Ina. "But Dad is awfully good and kind, and he is too, Billy. Both of 'em get angry easily, but you can always count on their doing the right thing in the end."

"You take after your mother, Ina, don't you?"

"So they tell me."

"I always thought your mother one of the nicest women I ever knew."

Ina merely smiled appreciatively, and Billy mounted his pony.

They rode toward the fence gate side by side. As they passed the schoolhouse door, they saw Miss Gardley, the teacher, hurry toward them. On the platform she waved to them.

"If you don't manage to go to Calgary next fall," she said to Ina, "be sure to come back to me for more high-school work."

"I certainly will if I can't go to the city, thank you," said Ina.

"You too, Billy," said Miss Gardley.

Billy smiled and nodded, and repeating their good-bys again, they rode out toward the roadway and turned after Tom, who was already a quarter of a mile away.

Billy's eyes reached out across the flat prairie distances toward Tom, but even as he looked and thought of Tom, his heart was heavy with what the teacher brought to mind.

"Gosh, Ina," he said as the two ponies fell into a steady gait, one in each rut of the roadway, "I hate to think of your going away to Calgary next year."

"Why don't you come too, then?"

Billy turned and looked at her. There was a faint smile on her lips, and a pleading look in her eyes.

"I wish I could," he said. "Father'd never let me go. Oh, he'd let me all right, but I wouldn't have the heart to go off and leave the whole farm to him."

Billy still had his eyes on Tom. Tom bothered him. He felt as if he had not been loyal to his friend.

"Tom's a funny boy," he said. "I wish he'd stay beside us."

"He worships you, Billy. He's kind of jealous. I suppose I shouldn'ta' come along."

"Aw, yes, you should, Ina. I don't see why—"

"That's the way boys are, though. They don't care much about their sisters. Tom's really a good brother, too, but he's a *boy*."

She laughed good-humoredly as she emphasized the word *boy*.

"So am I."

"But you haven't any sister."

"That's why—why I like Tom's sister."

"If you had a sister, that would make it better."

They both laughed heartily and nudged their ponies, who broke forward into a lope. They raced up a long, low hill slope, and when they got to the top, they saw Tom galloping on ahead. He had apparently heard them coming and was trying to reach out ahead of them.

When they saw him turn off the road and strike out across the open plains, they also turned off and took after him, laughing as they raced down into hollows and up hills and ridges. They came to a knoll and saw before them a longish, narrow pool of water, which had

gathered there from the melting of the winter snows.

"Let's have some fun with Tom," shouted Billy.

They struck out diagonally, so they could get around the pool at its nearest end, ahead of Tom. They were halfway to the water's edge before Tom turned and saw what they were trying to do.

First, he started away in the same direction to get around the pool, then seeing that they already had an advantage over him, he turned back abruptly and plunged right into the water.

"The foolish kid," cried Billy, slowing down into a trot to watch him.

"He'll be sopping wet up to his neck," muttered Ina. "He's liable to get pneumonia."

They trotted on, around the end of the pool, watching Tom splash through the water as they went. It seemed to Billy one time that the pony was actually swimming and that the water had reached Tom's hips.

"Gosh! That's ice water," he shouted to Ina, urging his pony faster.

On the other side of the pool, Ina leaped from her saddle and rushed to Tom who had dismounted and was trying to squeeze the water out of his pants.

"Tom, you haven't the sense you were born with!" she cried.

"Shucks!" stammered Tom, his teeth chattering. "It didn't look that deep to me."

"Here, take my coat," said Billy, dismounting and pulling his sheepskin off his back.

"No," muttered Tom, sheepishly. "I'll be all right when I get some of this water out of my pan—pants."

"You can't get it out here," said Billy, holding his

coat up for him, "put this around your shoulders, an' let's make a beeline for the Sailor shanty an' build a good fire there."

They helped Tom back on to his saddle, and remounting, the three of them neck and neck, raced away over the prairie toward the Sailor shanty, about two miles southwest of where they were.

Soon they came to another one of the countless hilltops that make up the waves of the prairie, and saw in the hollow nearby the abandoned Sailor shanty. It was standing forlornly, about fifty feet from the shore of an oval pond. A pair of ducks lifted heavily from the surface of the water and, flying away toward the west, almost touched the stovepipe that stuck up obliquely from the tar-papered roof.

Going down the slope into the hollow, Billy got ahead of his two companions, and at the shanty door, he tied his pony to the hitching post. Ina and Tom were still a hundred yards away when he opened the shanty door and stopped with a feeling of awe in the musty-smelling doorway. The dishes Bob Sailor had used in eating his last meal, before he had been killed, were on the table, and his bedclothes were still on his bed. Pots and pans were standing on the cold rusty stove, and the shelves back of the stove and to either side of the stovepipe were loaded with tins and jars of food-stuff.

He heard Ina and Tom riding into the yard, and he swiftly proceeded to build a fire. He helped himself lavishly to the contents of the kerosene can, standing against the end of the woodbox, and filling the stove with the dry pieces Bob had so neatly laid out, he soon

had a roaring fire. When he turned to Ina, leaving space at the warmest part of the stove for Tom, he saw on her face, as her eyes roamed around the shanty, a look of awe.

“Everything’s just as it was,” she said softly and with feeling, “the day Bob went off to try to catch the ghost mare.”

Billy twisted his head significantly and clicked his tongue. Tom was squatting and pushing his knees in toward the open oven. Billy’s eyes fell on the mass of clothes that was hanging at the end wall, back of the bed.

“Why don’t you put on a pair of Bob’s pants, so you can dry your own?” he said.

“Gosh, no!” cried Tom, making a face and shuddering. “I’ll dry out like this. Fire’s gettin’ real warm.”

Ina shut the door to conserve the warmth that was now oozing out of the stove.

Billy set a chair for Ina and another for himself, in front of the stove. When he sat down, he put his feet on the hearth. Watching Tom as he turned himself around to warm every side, he said, “If you put on a pair of Bob’s pants, you’d feel better.”

“Would you put on Bob’s pants?” demanded Tom.

“Sure, if I had to dry my own out.”

“You’re a great hero.”

“No. Why not?”

“Look,” cried Tom with a wave of his hand. “See all the food an’ things that’s around. Shucks, if people weren’t afraid to come here, if this’d been any other house abandoned like this, there wouldn’t be a thing

left here by this time. Nobody's touched anything. It's a year now since Bob was killed by the ghost mare."

Billy was about to protest, but Ina spoke.

"He wasn't killed by the white mare, Tom; what makes you say such a thing!"

"His horse happened to step into a badger hole," Billy added. "Gosh! How many times has your pony stepped into a badger hole?"

"Dozens o' times," said Tom, turning to warm his other side, "but I didn't get killed."

"Hundreds of people have been killed that way without chasing ghost mares," said Billy. "It depends on the way you fall. If a stone's handy enough, you get killed. The ghost mare had nothing to do with it."

"See how many people get killed in cars," suggested Ina, siding with Billy. "Look at Harry Devin. His car rolled down the canyon slope, rolled over several times, but he got out without a scratch. Just luck."

"Well, that's what I say," shouted Tom. "Just luck. In this case it was bad luck. That's what folks are saying. That mare's bad luck; she's been bad luck three times now."

"Three times!" repeated Billy. "What else happened outside of Bob Sailor getting killed and Pete Striker breaking a leg?"

"Ain't that bad enough luck for you?" demanded Tom.

"Don't get out of it that way, Tom," cried Billy, laughing triumphantly. "You said three. You only named one."

"I didn't say got killed; I said bad luck."

"All right, bad luck. Who are the three?"

"Two is enough for me."

"Yah, but you said three times, and I've heard lots o' folks say that," insisted Billy.

"Wait till next week," laughed Ina. "It'll be time to start saying four."

"By next year, it should be forty-four."

"You an' Ina know all there is to know," said Tom angrily. "More'n anybody else."

Billy laughed at his getting angry.

"I'm going to make a cup of coffee out o' poor Bob's stuff, here," he said in an effort to get him over it. Taking the tea kettle, he went out to get some water.

"Probably find a skunk in the well b' this time," said Tom.

"Skunk's good for you," Billy called back. "They make medicine out o' skunk fat. Some folks do."

"You know, it's kind o' cold outside," said Billy coming back and shutting the door. "Durn cozy in here."

"Bob was such a clean bachelor," said Ina. "Very few men batching alone like this keep a place as clean as he always did."

"I used to eat with Bob a lot," said Billy, sitting down again to wait for the water to boil. "Used to be just as good eatin' as in any house with womenfolks."

"Everybody said that," said Ina.

Tom was still silent and sullen looking.

"A good cup o' coffee, Tom, will warm you up inside," said Billy.

"No dead man's coffee for me," growled Tom.

"Won't you drink any?" asked Billy incredulously.

"No, I won't drink any."

"He just says that to be contrary," said Ina.

"You have no right to take these things," said Tom.
"Don't belong to you."

"Aw, Tom," said Billy, "now you're talkin' foolish. There's not a relative of Bob's ever showed up. If Bob was alive, he'd say, 'You go into my place and make yourself at home,' as he always told me. If he is in another world now, looking down on us, I bet he's glad we're making use of his things. I know I would be in his place."

Ina washed out the old coffee pot, and Billy took down a still unopened can of coffee from the shelf. He broke off the key and opened the can, and Ina measured out the required amount of coffee. Searching further, they came upon a stack of small tins of canned milk and a huge jar of sugar. On one of the lower shelves back of the stove, Billy found a large tin of gingersnaps, half full.

Every time they discovered anything they could use, Ina and Billy expressed their delight. They set the table for three and played around at decorating it as if they were preparing for company. All the while Tom turned from side to side at the stove, his clothes still steaming as if he were on fire. But when Ina and Billy sat down, Tom refused to join them.

"Tom, you make me ashamed of you," said Ina.

"Why?" demanded Tom. "Because I don't happen to want your coffee?"

"Because you hold a grudge so long."

"Grudge," repeated Tom. "What grudge?"

"Oh, never mind," said Ina. "If I tell you, you'll have another grudge to hold against me."

"Gee, this is good coffee," said Billy as he smacked his lips. "Let's come here often like this, now school's over an' we won't be gettin' together much."

Tom now looked as if he wished he were having a cup of coffee.

"Come on, Tom," said Billy coaxingly, getting up and taking hold of the coffee pot. "Be a good sport, an' have a cup with us."

"I really don't want any," said Tom. "I'm not much of a hand at coffee, anyway."

"Oh, Tom," said Ina. She looked as if she were on the verge of bursting with the desire to laugh.

"I don't drink a lot o' coffee," protested Tom. "You know Mother don't like us to."

"Mother sure would be glad to know you're so concerned about her wishes."

Tom looked at her and scowled.

"Let's wash up the dishes and leave everything as Bob would have it, himself," said Billy, taking up the cups and saucers.

Ina washed them and Billy wiped them, talking happily as they worked, but Tom stood by the stove quietly, drying himself. Suddenly they were startled by a faint, distant neigh, and as Billy rushed to the door and opened it, the shanty was filled with the vibrations of the neighs and whinnies of the three ponies tied to the hitching post. Across the water, on the opposite side of the pond, stood the ghost mare, her white

form cut out of the background of the herd that ran with her.

"Don't," cried Billy, holding up his hand to keep Tom from going out, "she'll run away if she sees you."

Ina came up to the two boys and looked out from between them.

"Isn't she smart?" she whispered, in fear of frightening the white mare away. "She knows she's safe with the water between us."

From the doorway of the shanty, the white mare appeared to be standing several feet in the water, as if she had just taken a drink. Her head was high in the air, evidently alarmed to find trespassers on what she regarded as her domain.

"Don't move," whispered Billy.

"She's watching us," muttered Ina.

"There's our sorrel at the left of her," cried Tom.

The white mare turned suddenly, as if she had heard something, and went splashing out of the water. The herd swept along with her, so that for a moment they covered her. Then the white mare appeared halfway up the slope, ahead of all the rest. She seemed to glide up there by magic.

"She doesn't run like an ordinary horse," muttered Billy.

"She goes like a streak of lightning," Ina whispered in his ear.

"She moves so gracefully though," said Billy.

"Because she's noble," said Ina. "She's a queen—a great lady. We ought to call her Lady Lightning."

The white mare had stopped and whirled around to look back.

"Look at that beautiful white neck!"

"Hasn't she got a long tail? See how it curves out behind her."

"I'd cut it off if I had her," growled Tom.

"That would make her look like other horses," argued Ina.

"She'd look like a plucked chicken," laughed Billy.

"You just say that because Ina said it," retorted Tom, and he pushed his way out of the door. "I'm goin' t' chase her."

As soon as Tom appeared outdoors, the wild mare swept up the rest of the slope, and the entire herd vanished with her beyond the hilltop. Tom mounted his pony, Ina ran for hers, and Billy, shutting the shanty door carefully, came after them. Ina waited for Billy, but Tom was already on the other side of the pond when she and Billy started.

Up on the hilltop Billy saw the wild herd, like a mere smudge on the distant plains, heading eastward.

"She isn't going to the badlands," shouted Billy.

Ina was now slightly behind.

"Oh, let her go," she called, "we'll never catch up with her."

Billy held his pony back. Soon Ina and he were again side by side.

"Tom's goin' after her," said Billy. "Let's go on down into the canyon. I haven't seen the badlands since last fall."

"I haven't either," said Ina. "You know, I get lonesome for them if I don't see them for a long time."

“I do, too.”

“You know that man that passed through here last summer from the States. He said our badlands here in the Red Deer Valley are more beautiful than the Dakota badlands.”

“You know when I like to see them?” asked Billy, their ponies so close together that his knee pressed against Ina’s. “By moonlight.”

“There should be a moon tonight.”

“Let’s stay long enough to see it.”

“I’m afraid my mother would worry; Tom’ll get home ahead of me.”

“She won’t worry, Ina; she’ll know you’re with me.”

They turned directly southward, the prairie before them seemingly flat, to the very horizon. Only a thin streak of shadow lay horizontally across their way, less than a quarter of a mile ahead. As they approached this shadow, it widened slightly, but not until they came to the very edge of the canyon did the valley of the badlands appear in its broad immensity. When they actually reached the slope, where it fell away from their feet, they stopped and stared silently for a few minutes.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” whispered Ina.

“Weird! Looks like a dead city down there, a lot of empty buildings.”

“Churches and towers—skyscrapers.”

Billy started down first. The pathway that turned into the canyon there had been worn down by the wild herd. It was not too easy a decline to make on horseback. He went first as a sort of protection to Ina. His pony’s neck fell away so abruptly that he had the

feeling that if it weren't for his saddle horn, he would go rolling down over the horse's head.

In the center of the flat bottom of the canyon wound the silver stream of the Red Deer River, and for more than a mile to either side of its shores, the canyon was cluttered with sandstone forms that stood up like boulders, like giant shocks of wheat or cocks of hay in a meadow. Some of these weird forms were a hundred feet high; others, not so tall, were broad, some tapering into spires. One, cut away at its lower end, had been rounded out by the winds till it looked like a huge mushroom or umbrella. Many of them looked like Oriental temples with domes, minarets, turrets, and buttresses.

"You feel as though you are going into another world," shouted Ina.

Billy started to answer that, but his eyes caught a streak of smoke that moved like a wisp of cloud over the tops of a group of the formations.

"Somebody's camping down here in the badlands," he called back. "No wonder the white mare didn't go down here."

"Who would settle in the badlands?"

"Some crazy sheepherder, maybe."

"But I don't see any sheep, do you?"

"Gosh, they may be around somewhere back of some of the formations. Sure hope the sheepherders aren't startin' to come down here—mess up the place."

From the foot of the slope, they made their way between the sandstone forms to the river shore, and there they turned eastward, toward the bridge, some two miles downstream, and their road home.

As they turned down along the shore, Billy saw another wisp of smoke. This time it came from beyond a butte a thousand feet or so ahead of him.

"Durn that man, whoever he is," said Billy, "let's drive him out of here—camping in our badlands!"

As he said this, Billy switched the reins to his left hand and, with his right arm held up like a sword urged his pony forward, into a lope. Ina came loping right after him, laughing with delight.

A few feet before the sandstone butte that shut away the clearing where the smoke was rising, they dropped back to a walk. The loud, excited neigh of a horse startled them.

"He's got a horse, too," whispered Billy, and Ina unconsciously reined her pony closer to Billy's.

As soon as they passed the edge of the sandstone wall, they saw a large tent in the center of a flat open space, and a few feet in front of its open flaps they saw a man in boots and shirt sleeves, who seemed to have heard them coming and run out to see who it was.

"Good evening," he said. "When I heard my saddle pony neighing, I thought that wild herd was down again."

Billy liked his intimate, friendly manner. He looked like a city man, appeared well groomed, though he had only a khaki shirt on, open at the neck, and his khaki trousers and boots were stained with earth as if he had been digging.

"We just saw the wild herd a little while ago," said Billy, "but she—I mean the white mare that's leading 'em—kind o' turned off an' away from the canyon."

"She's afraid to come down here when I have my

fire going," said the man. "I found that out. But she drives me crazy during the night. I'll have to begin keeping my fire going all night if I'm to get any sleep."

"They won't bother your tent, will they?" asked Ina.

"Oh, no. My saddle pony goes wild when they come down, though, and tears at his rope. I'm afraid he'll strangle himself, trying to break free and go off with them."

"Did you buy your saddle pony around here?" asked Billy.

"Yes, I bought him from Mark Skinner in Steveville."

"Oh, well," said Billy, "he was probably running with the wild herd last winter."

"Skinner said he was."

"No wonder then," said Ina.

"Skinner was lucky to be able to get hold of him," added Billy.

"I should think the farmers would do something about that wild mare," said the man, brushing back the heavy mass of black hair from his white forehead.

"They've sent a petition to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police," said Billy, "asking them to come an' help."

"These cowboys around here have to have the police come and help them round up a horse?" asked the man, exposing white even teeth in a broad grin.

Billy had never thought of that before. A faint flush came into his cheeks.

"Well," he began just a bit resentfully, "there's lots about it makes it hard for us. It's no easy trick for anybody to get that wild mare. She's so wise, you can't

trap her. She keeps coming down here, and among these buttes it's awful hard to get at her."

"Some people feel, too," said Ina with a defensive tone, "that after they have gone through a whole lot of trouble to get the white mare, if they get her, somebody'll come along and claim her—all that work and trouble for nothing."

"From what I've heard," said the man, still smiling amiably, "there's been so much superstition built up around the mare, many of the cowboys are afraid—"

"There's been an awful lot o' trouble tryin' t'get her," said Billy, almost against his own position in the matter, feeling it incumbent upon himself to defend the district. "Bob Sailor killed—"

"Yes, I heard of that," said the man, "but, as I understand it, he got killed as any man might at any time. People seem to want to blame the white mare—the ghost mare, I've been told they call her."

"That's all a lot of foolishness," said Ina.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said the man, "glad that everybody in this country doesn't feel that way."

"I don't," said Billy. "If I knew for sure that after I got her, she'd be mine and nobody'd claim her, I'd go after her tomorrow."

"I'm no horseman," said the man, "but I believe, from what people have been telling me, that the cowboys around here are too impatient. They try to rope her much too soon. I believe that if I were doing it, I'd just keep her running all day and all night, if need be, run her till she's so tuckered out she almost drops, and has no more strength to fight back."

Billy's eyes dilated as he looked at the fellow and

listened to him. There was good sense in what he was saying.

"By the time she was as tired as all that," ventured Ina, smiling, "you'd have killed half a dozen saddle ponies, chasing her."

"Oh, I wouldn't run any saddle pony more than an hour or two—change ponies all the time. You couldn't kill that pony of mine. Dino is so full of energy, I'm almost afraid to ride him."

"Dino?" repeated Ina.

"From Dinosaur," explained the man. "You know what a dinosaur is?"

"You mean those prehistoric monsters?" asked Ina. "I never saw one."

"No, I'm sure you didn't," laughed the man. "You're not quite old enough."

"How old would you have to be?" demanded Billy.

"About sixty million years."

"Have you seen one?" asked Billy mischievously.

"Do I look that old?"

"I meant one of those—those skeletons," said Ina.

"I know you did," said the man. "I was just trying to be funny."

"Is that what you're doin' around here?" cried Billy excitedly.

"Looking for dinosaurs, yes."

"What do you do with them?"

"I sell them to museums. In the museums they are put up so that people can come and look at them and get acquainted with their ancestors."

"Sixty million years," muttered Billy. "How do y'u know it's that long since they were living?"

"Well that's pretty difficult to explain," said the man. "We know by the layers of earth in which we find these skeletons how long ago they lived. It takes so many million years to make a layer, and when every dinosaur that's been unearthed has been found in the particular layer that was formed sixty million years ago and earlier, we know that it is at least sixty million years since they lived on this earth."

"What made them come around here?"

"That I can't tell you. I suppose it's the food they found. The plant-eating dinosaurs lived on the plants that grew in the marshes, and the flesh-eating big fellows lived on the plant-eating ones."

"How did you find out that they used to live around here?"

"These badlands you see were formed by the river cutting up the earth, eating it away from the sandstone rock. That, of course, exposed layers of earth that are deep down. I can hardly take a walk for a mile or so without finding petrified bones that have fallen out of the layers, where the wind and frost and rain washed the earth away from them."

"Gosh!" cried Billy. "This place musta' been full of 'em."

"What kind of looking things were they?" asked Ina.

"Sometime, you must come and visit me in the day-time. It's getting toward evening now. I'll show you a lot of pictures of specimens found in other places. They were great and terrible lizards that walked on two powerful legs and had long tails. Some of them were fifty feet long or more and were so tall that their heads were twenty feet from the ground."

"Gosh!" cried Billy, looking around him. If those badlands had ever struck him as weird they made him feel a thousand times more eerie now. He tried to imagine great big monsters, fifty feet long, moving around the formations like terrible lizards.

"No use looking around for them," said the man, laughing at Billy. "You won't find any here now but dead ones."

"What do you call it?" began Billy. "I mean what do you call finding skeletons like these of prehistoric animals?"

"*Pa-le-on-tol-o-gy.*" He sounded it out slowly for him. "I am a *pa-le-on-tol-o-gist.*"

He walked up to Ina and, extending his hand, shook hands with her.

"My name is George Selden."

Then he introduced himself in the same way to Billy.

"We must be going, Billy," said Ina. "Mother won't know what happened to me."

"Well, come again," said Mr. Selden. "I'll be a pretty lonesome fellow here, all summer long—probably way into the fall and winter."

"I'll come as often as you'll let me," said Billy enthusiastically, "Gosh! I want to know more about those fifty-foot monsters. These badlands'll never be the same to me again."

"Me neither!" cried Ina.

As they started off, having said good-by again, the evening peace was shattered by the pleading neigh of Dino, off on a grass patch beyond a group of the sandstone formations.

"He's as lonesome as I am," shouted George Selden, now in the opening of his tent.

"It must be awful lonesome," said Ina, as they rode off side by side along the river shore. "I'm going to have Daddy ask him to our house for Sunday dinner."

"He's a smart man," said Billy. "You know, Ina, he's got a good head on him. That *is* the way to get the white mare. Just take it easy; keep her goin' till she is about ready to drop. An' now that he's down here in the canyon an' keeps his smoke goin', she won't be tearin' down here to make a fool of a fellow, leadin' him around the old buttes."

"He's well educated, you can see," said Ina. "I bet he's gone through college—through several colleges. That's what I'd like to do."

"For a woman," said Billy, "it isn't so necessary."

"That's an old-fashioned idea, Billy. I'm surprised at you, saying that."

"Well, I mean—"

"You say *necessary*. Education is not a matter of being necessary. You have a mind and you want to—to improve it."

"I hate to think—you going away for so long."

Ina laughed with that delightful little ripple of laughter that set her apart from everybody, to him.

"I won't be so far away," she said, as she looked at him with her brown, liquid eyes. "Even if I go on to college, it will be somewhere nearby, and I'll always be coming home often."

The ponies beat along steadily on the hard sand of

the shore. Their heads bobbed rhythmically up and down. The saddles creaked as leather rubbed against leather, and the feeling of evening began flooding the eerie formations in shadow.

Ina leaned over in her saddle, closer to Billy, and as her face lighted up with a smile, she asked, "What are you thinking of, Billy? You're so quiet."

"So many things happen to people," said Billy, "when they go away."

"What could happen? I'll always love my home, the prairie, these badlands, the river—all the people I've known and grown up with."

"That's nice," said Billy curtly.

"Billy! you sound angry."

"Oh, no. Just feel bad."

"Why do you feel bad?"

"You want me to be glad to lose you?"

"You won't be losing me."

"You'll be going to school for years. You've got to go to high school alone for three more years, and you'll want to go to college, too. You'll meet a lot o' people in that time, Ina. You'll forget all about us farm folks, out here."

Ina reached out and took hold of his arm.

"I'm not that kind of friend," she said.

Billy started to say something, but they had come to the road that lay like a dark ribbon across the canyon, and they heard hoofbeats on the wooden floor of the bridge over the river. A rider on horseback was coming across, apparently from town.

"I wonder who that is?" whispered Ina.

"Nobody from around here," said Billy.

They didn't wait for the stranger but turned onto the road and went homeward. The rider could be heard increasing his speed in order to catch up with them. When he had come quite close to them, Billy turned his pony into the rut, behind Ina, to give him a chance to join them or go on past if he wished to.

"Am I on the right road to Wilber Steele's?" the stranger asked as he drew up to the side of Billy.

Billy turned to answer and was amazed to see that the man was in the uniform of the Canadian Mounted Police.

"Yes, sir," said Billy, alive with new interest. "We're going that way. I'll show you where the road turns off to Steele's."

"Good," said the officer. "I asked the right man, then."

"I guess maybe you did."

"My name is McKenzie, Sergeant McKenzie."

"My name is Billy Thornton."

"Thornton," repeated the Mounty. "I think that was one of the names on the petition."

"Yah, my father signed it," said Billy. Then, as Ina turned around to look at the stranger, he added, "This is Miss Ina Rayner."

"Glad to meet you, Miss Rayner," said the officer. "I believe there was a Rayner, too, on the petition."

"Everybody in this district signed it," said Ina.

"Yes-s-s!" said Sergeant McKenzie. "That ghost mare's got half o' Canada up in arms."

"You going to try to catch her?" asked Billy.

"No-o-o! I can't afford the time to chase after her—put salt on her tail."

"What are you going to do?" asked Ina earnestly, turning about in her saddle.

"I'm going to shoot her," said McKenzie, "as soon as I can get near enough to her to hit her."

"Oh!" cried Ina.

"What else could I do?" demanded the officer. "If the cowboys can't capture her, I'm not going to try."

"Suppose, now," began Billy in a shaky, uncertain voice, "suppose you hit one of the colts that—"

"I've been sent out to shoot her," said the Mounty. "If I was that poor a shot, I wouldn't be a sergeant in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police."

"Gosh!" muttered Billy. "Seems like we ought to try to get her first."

"Why didn't you do that before sending for me?"

"People've been kind of afraid. One thing—most of us's been afraid somebody'd come along and claim her after we did get her."

"I can tell you," said McKenzie with authority, "that you don't have to worry about that. That mare's been running loose three or four years, hasn't she? She's become a public nuisance, luring away other people's colts. She's outlawed. If any owner showed up, he could be sued for damages. Many farmers have lost the use of their colts; that's worth something. Besides, by golly, let the owner show up and I'll hand him a bill for my expenses coming out here."

They came into the Rayner yard. The Rayner dog was almost exploding with excitement. He came forward to meet them, ran back fearfully into the stream of lamplight that poured from the Rayner kitchen

window, and whirled around and dashed forward again.

"Come and have supper with us, Billy," said Ina.

"I better not tonight, Ina," said Billy, his head bursting with ideas he had decided to keep for his own. "I've got to show the Mounty to Steele's, anyway."

The Sergeant's horse was prancing about, nervous because the dog was worrying him.

"Lie down, Turk," ordered Ina.

An angry voice called Turk from the doorway of the kitchen. John Rayner came forward to meet them.

"Ina?" he called. When she answered, his voice filled with anger. "Where've you been all this time? Tommy's been home an hour or two."

"Just went for a little ride," said Ina. "We were down in the badlands. There's a man down there, digging for petrified bones, Daddy. He's a wonderfully interesting man."

"That doesn't excuse your coming in at this hour."

"Daddy!" said Ina reprovingly. "This gentleman is Sergeant McKenzie of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police."

The Mounty had quieted his horse a bit and whirled him around. He leaned down in his saddle and shook hands with John Rayner.

"So you won't come in and have supper with us, Billy?" asked Ina, riding with him to the barn.

"I'll be around again, soon enough, Ina," said Billy. "My mother'll be sore at me for coming late, too."

The officer was obviously anxious to get to his destination, and by the time Ina and Billy had reached the barn, he was at Billy's side.

"You're going to show me where to turn to Steele's," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Billy. Bidding Ina good-by, he led the way up the road again.

All the way up to where the road branched off to Steele's farm, Billy kept plying the Mounty with questions, whose main import he thought he was hiding.

When he had directed the officer and had pointed out the distant twinkling light in the Steele home, Sergeant McKenzie said abruptly, "If you are planning to try to capture the ghost mare, let me know definitely. I don't like the idea of killing her, myself. I'll allow you two days in which to try, but if you haven't got her by that time, I'll have to shoot her."

"Yes, I'm going to try," said Billy in a voice that was filled with awe. "Anyway, I'll let you know for sure soon as I've talked it over with my father. I'll let you know tonight."

So saying, he nudged his pony with his heels and whirling around, loped away into the night, homeward.

CHAPTER 2

Billy Breaks the News

THE lamplight in the kitchen window of his home blinked like a red star in the distant prairie night ahead of him. Billy Thornton slowed down a bit. The struggle he would have to put up, to get his parents' permission to try to capture the wild mare, made it necessary for him to think hard on the best way to break the news to them.

His mother worried him most. If he could get his father off into the barn and tell him the facts first, his father might support him. The superstitious fears that clung to the ghost mare did not bother him much. He was young and by nature too reasonable to be inclined to be superstitious. He had ridden horses ever since he had been four years old, and riding horses, the wildest of them, had no terrors for him. Suppose Bob Sailor did lose his life and Pete Striker did break a leg in the effort to get the ghost mare? These accidents were happening on farms all over the world all the time without ghost mares.

Besides, the paleontologist's smart suggestion to run the wild mare down before roping her seemed to eliminate all the risk. The idea seemed so simple that he

was almost ashamed that neither he nor anyone else in the district had thought of it.

As his pony, Perry, dropped lazily into a steady walk, Billy imagined all the details of the venture. He saw himself chasing the white mare leisurely, all day, till she was completely played out.

The thought of owning that white mare, of racing over the prairies on her, was the most thrilling thing he could possibly imagine. It appealed to him somehow as a sort of compensation for the loss he felt in Ina's leaving the district. He was very much disturbed, because Ina was planning seriously to go to Calgary. School had probably closed for him, for good. He doubted whether he would be going back next fall if Ina was not going to be home.

As soon as the Thornton shepherd dog, Nellie, announced his arrival in the yard, the kitchen door opened, and Billy's mother called from the lamp-lighted doorway, "That you, Billy? You worried me t' death!"

"What in the world you worryin' 'bout?" shouted Billy.

Nellie leaped up at him excitedly as if she, too, had been worried about him. But Billy was so preoccupied with the impending struggle, he hardly noticed the dog.

He stopped to water and feed his pony. He bedded his stall with clean straw. He wanted to give his mother time to "cool off" about his having come home so late. He was a bit impatient with his good mother. She just refused to accept the fact that he had grown up. He was no longer a little boy. His father treated him like the

grown-up man he was. Why not? He was doing the work of a man on the farm.

He started for the house finally, with determination. He was going to convince his mother that he wasn't a baby any more. First, he put an expression of manly seriousness on his face. Then, with a firm grip, he opened the door into the kitchen.

"Well!" cried his mother at the stove, a kettle lid in one hand, a large fork in the other. "Nice time t' come home from school!"

"What's wrong about goin' for a little ride, last day of school?" demanded Billy, speaking as emphatically as she had.

Sarah Thornton, with a look of amazement, turned to her husband to see how this new attitude on the part of their son struck him. Billy calmly went on to the washbowl to wash, and Oscar Thornton, already at the table, his good-natured face almost bursting with the desire to laugh, helped himself to some meat.

"It was the last day of school, Sarah, wasn't it?" he said.

Billy was delighted with his father, but he could see that his mother felt defeated, and he was sorry. Quickly wiping himself, he went to her and put his arms around her.

"Too bad, Mother, ain't it, kids have t' grow up," he said.

"Go on," she said, pretending to be angrier than she really was, "you ain't half the man you think you are yet."

"How'm I ever goin' to be one if you never let me start?"

"That's about right, too," muttered his father cautiously.

"Where was you all the time?" asked his mother, bringing him a plateful of food.

"Come sit down, Mother," said Billy, getting hungrily at the huge pile of food on his plate, "I have a lot o' news to tell you."

Sarah Thornton looked at her son with new interest. Confined as she was to the remote, lonely farmyard, nothing excited her so much as the prospect of news. Being a stout woman, she waddled when she hurried, and shuffling to the stove, she took out the custard pie she had just baked and hurried back to the table. She sat down at once, prepared to listen, and while her hands moved among the dishes, her eyes were on Billy.

"First of all," began Billy, "you know Tommy Rayner. When the party was over, he comes out, an' he says to me, 'Billy, let's you an' me go for a ride to the badlands, an' see if the Mounted Police's been out to get the ghost mare.' I thought it'd be kind o' nice to take a little ride down to the badlands, school over, an' all the spring work comin'; not much more time for fun. Ina was right there, so I said, 'Want t' come, Ina? Let's all go.'

"Well, you know what a sorehead Tom can be. He had a notion to go galloping away, just him and me. He got sore because I asked Ina."

"You really didn't want Ina along either," said his father, shaking his head and pretending to be very serious.

"Aw, Dad, you have to be pokin' fun all the time."

Oscar Thornton howled with laughter.

"Let 'im tell his news, Oscar," said Sarah Thornton.

"Tom, sore, goes off by himself," Billy began again.

"His father's the same way," put in Oscar Thornton.

"You don't just do somethin' to suit him, an' he gets mad. Stops talkin'."

"Why don't you let him tell his story, Oscar?"

"Ina an' I trotted along a quarter of a mile behind him," Billy went on. "About a mile this side of Rayners', Tom turned off the road an' headed for the badlands, straight across the prairie."

"Ina, I suppose, had to go chasin' right after him," said his father.

"She really ain't bad that way, Dad. She's his sister; she kind o' worries about him."

"No, the womenfolks aren't as bad as John that way."

"We kept goin' after him. When we came to where the Sullivan farm used to be, that ridge to the southwest of it, we saw a big spring pool down in the hollow. That pool's half a mile long. I thought we'd have fun with Tom. I shot out at an angle to get around the end of the pool and get ahead of him. But as soon as he saw us doing that, afraid, I guess, that he couldn't make it if he tried to go around the end of the pool as we were, the little fool goes lickety split right into the water, up to his neck."

"He'll have the pneumonia, sure's you're alive," muttered Billy's mother, horrified. "It's far from summer yet."

"That's what Ina was afraid of," said Billy.

"That boy," said Oscar Thornton, "had ought to be taken over the knee an' spanked."

"John Rayner'd take the head off o' you," said his wife, "if he heard you say so."

"I'll tell him that face to face!" cried Thornton.

"Well go on, Billy," said his mother. "Is that the news you was goin' t' tell us?"

"The only place near there where we could build a fire an' dry him up," Billy went on, "was the Bob Sailor shanty. I give Tom my coat—his was wet—"

"An' you likely to get pneumonia," said his mother. When Billy smiled, she added, "An' I don't like your goin' to the Sailor shanty, neither."

"What you afraid of, Mother, Bob's ghost?"

"Go on with the news."

"We went to the Sailor shanty, and I built a roarin' fire. While Tom was dryin' himself out an' Ina and I were sittin' around, nothin' to do, I boiled some water and made a cup o' coffee. Tom, he wouldn't drink none."

"I wouldn't either," said Sarah Thornton.

"If Bob coulda' spoke to us," began Billy very forcefully, shutting one eye, "he'da' said, 'Go right ahead, you folks, an' have a good time. I'll never use that coffee again.' "

"Just the same, you was takin' something that didn't belong to you."

"But it don't belong to nobody," argued Billy. "Nobody wants to come and take it. All the farmers 'round here are afraid to go near the shanty. If we don't eat up that stuff, it'll just spoil. Even the gophers can't get into it, all in tins and jars."

"I can't see nothin' wrong in their takin' a cup o' coffee," muttered Oscar Thornton as if he had been

cogitating over the legal aspects of the matter. "It'd be wrong to go cartin' stuff away from there. But just makin' yourself at home right there, waitin' for Tom to dry out—nothin' wrong about that."

"The judge's given his opinion," said Billy's mother sarcastically, "go ahead and tell us the news—thought you had some news t' tell."

"It was good coffee I made, Mother."

"Musta' been! I hope it was better'n the oatmeal you made yesterday morning."

"That oatmeal was good!" cried Billy. "Just a bit too much salt. Shucks! That can happen to anybody."

"Did I ever tell you, Billy, how Mother roasted a chicken for me the first day after we was married?"

"Ever!" exclaimed Sarah Thornton. "I've heard you tell it at least seven hundred times m'self, before him."

"She forgot t' put dressin' in it," began Oscar, rocking himself with laughter.

"You don't have t' put dressin' into a roast chicken," retorted Sarah, half laughing herself.

"Whatever was the reason," said Oscar, "when the chicken came to the table, it fell into ashes the moment I touched it."

"Young brides have t' learn—"

"You wasn't so awful young, either, Sarah."

"Five years younger than you."

"A man is supposed to be older."

"Well, what do you want to make out? You made a mistake?"

"No, no!" cried Oscar, delighted with the effect he was having. "It ain't so much what a woman is when

you marry her, Billy, as what she can become. I have the best cook in the province."

"I haven't heard any news yet," said Billy's mother with a look of pretended impatience.

"We had no more'n finished our coffee," Billy went on, "when we heard a neighin' in the distance. Gosh, you can't mistake that white mare's neighin'. We opened the door carefully so's not to frighten her away. Our three ponies at the hitching post were screechin' like a lot o' night owls, answering the white mare. There she was across the pond, her head up high, lookin' us over, but keepin' ready to dash away.

"Gee! Dad, that mare's the most beautiful piece o' horseflesh I ever saw—anybody ever saw!"

"Is that the great piece o' news you brought home?"

"It is great news, ain't it?"

"T' you, maybe," said his mother, getting up in disgust to go at her dishes.

"Please sit down, Mother," begged Billy. "I haven't gotten to the news yet."

"No foolin' around now, Billy." His mother sat down again rather sheepishly and scowled at her husband, whose knowing smile annoyed her. "If you're foolin' me, I c'n still take you cross my knee."

"Yes, when we have more time, Mother, maybe I'll let you try it, for the fun of it."

"Go on with your news!"

"Tom was for chasin' the mare, right then and there."

"What for?" demanded Oscar Thornton.

"Does the boy want t' get killed?" asked Billy's mother.

"Gee, Mother!" cried Billy. "You talk as if just lookin' at the mare might kill a person."

"Something bad is going to come from messin' with that mare."

"Gosh, Mother! You're awful superstitious."

"How'd you get so wise, all of a sudden?"

"Well, Mother—gosh!"

"Get goin' with that news," ordered his father. "I'm gettin' anxious about it m'self."

"Anyway, Tom went off chasin' the white mare and the herd, but the white mare, she didn't seem to want to go down to the badlands. She turned at the canyon and raced away to the east. We came there to see the badlands again, so Ina an' I went down into the canyon. As we started down the slope, by golly, I saw smoke, like from a train, down along the river. That's why the wild mare was afraid to go down there."

"Smoke!" exclaimed Oscar Thornton.

"Yes, sir. We saw that somebody was livin' down in the badlands. We thought it was some sheepherder, but it wasn't. When we got down along the river, we saw a tent. Gee! A dandy tent with a window an' a floor, smoke belchin' out of the pipe that come out of it."

"A tent!"

"Ina an' I, we said we ought to drive 'im out of our badlands, whoever it was, but when we saw him and talked to him, he was an awful fine man—"

"How'd you know he was so fine, just seein' 'im?" asked Sarah Thornton.

"We talked to him."

"What's he doin' there?" demanded Oscar.

"He's a *pale-ee-on-tol-o-gist*."

"A what?" demanded his mother, and his father wrinkled his brow.

"He digs up old bones out of the earth."

"A gravedigger!" Billy's mother seemed to rise out of her seat.

"No, no," cried Billy impatiently. "He's a scientist. There are bones of animals in those sandstone formations that lived there sixty million years ago."

Mrs. Thornton rose from her chair and slapped the table with her two hands. The incredulous smile on her face indicated an utter lack of words that would express her disgust at such a fantastic tale.

"You're not goin' to get the news that way, Mother."

"Sixty million years ago!" she said. "What kind o' news is that? The world ain't been that long."

"Dad," said Billy, turning to him with the idea that he'd be more reasonable, "there were monsters fifty feet long roamin' around where those badlands are. Dinosaurs, Mr. Selden calls 'em. George Selden, that's the man's name. He says for sixty million years those monsters have been dead now. They've found the skeletons of many of 'em. Shucks! Tommy an' me've found many big bones, like great big rib bones down there, but we never knew what they were from."

"I knew something bad'd come out of—"

"What's bad about findin' out things, Mother?"

"Boy, you've lost your mind! Sixty million years!"

"I ain't lost any of my mind. I have every bit of it an' a little more, by gosh, than I ever had before."

"What's he goin' t' do with the bones?" asked his father.

"He sells 'em to museums in the big cities. There

they set 'em up just like they were when they lived, and people come to see 'em."

"Is he goin' to keep 'em here a while, before he sends 'em off?" asked Thornton. "I'd like to see 'em."

"I guess so," said Billy. "He likes to have people come and see 'em. He likes to tell all about 'em. Great big monsters with heads twenty feet off the ground."

"Just a lot of old women's tales," said Sarah Thornton.

"Why do you say that?" demanded her husband. "You don't know. If you went there an' saw the bones right before you, wouldn't you believe 'em? If the bones are there, there musta' been animals to leave 'em."

"That's what I say," said Billy, pleased with his father's reasonableness.

"You'll be diggin' bones yourself now," said his mother from the stove.

"Come sit down, Mother. I ain't given you half the news yet."

"If you're foolin' me, Billy, I'll take a stick to you. I got work t' do."

She sat down again, and Billy proceeded once more.

"That man, Mr. Selden. Dad, told me something that's got me all het up. He says the way he'd capture that wild mare is not just to run after her an' try to rope her. That's the way people get into trouble. He says, an' he's right, by gosh, the way to do it is to just go after her easy like—start out early in the morning, before dawn, take along plenty of ponies, an' changing ponies all the time, keep her a-goin' all day long till she gets so tired and hungry she's ready to drop."

"I knew that was a-comin'," cried Billy's mother, ris-

ing again. "Billy, you take after that mare, an' you'll kill yourself like Bob Sailor."

"Don't get so excited, Sarah," said Oscar, waving her down with a hand, "let the boy have his say. Nobody's goin' after nothin' yet."

"She's just a horse after all," Billy went on. "Mr. Selden says you don't even have to chase her much after the first hour or two, just keep goin' after her, so she won't stop for grass or even water. By nightfall, I bet, she'd be so tuckered out, it'd be nothin' to rope her! Anyway, Dad, just as we come to the Cassils Road, we saw a mounted policeman comin' across the bridge. He caught up to us, and he asked us if he was on the right road to Steele's. He said he come out because the farmers here sent for him."

"I know," said Oscar Thornton. "I signed the papers."

"Well, gosh, Dad!" cried Billy, now in deadly earnest. "He says he's goin' to shoot that beautiful mare down."

"What else can he do?"

"Shoot her!"

"He can't bother tryin' to catch her."

"Why don't some of us here try?"

"Ain't enough killed already?" demanded Billy's mother.

"Bob got killed. A hundred people have been killed the same way on the prairies—their horses goin' into badger holes. Why do you say enough people?"

"What about Pete Striker?"

"Pete broke a leg, but Pete was a fool—"

"All fools but you, Billy. That city man's given you a swelled head, I'm afraid."

"I ain't got any swelled head. He just showed me how it should be done. He ain't no great horseman, but he just got the sense to think it out. You need no more get killed keepin' after the wild mare all day, than you need to get killed goin' from here to Rayners'."

"Sounds as if you've made up your mind to go for the mare yourself, Billy," said his mother concernedly.

"I'm not goin' t' let that policeman shoot down a beautiful mare like that. Gosh! I could get three hundred dollars for her in town any day."

"S'pposin' now," asked his father, closing one eye and puckering his lips, "after you've got the wild mare, somebody comes along an' says she's his mare—what you goin' t' do about it?"

"That's just what I asked the Mounty," cried Billy. "He says they can't claim her. He says because she's been a nuisance for three or four years she's outlawed. He says if an owner did show up, every man in the province that's had their colts run off with her could sue him for damages. The Mounty says he would be the first to make him pay his expenses for comin' out here."

"Well, you're sure makin' it look dead easy," laughed Oscar Thornton.

"I don't like it at all," said Mrs. Thornton.

"Mother, that's foolish superstition."

"Here, here," admonished Oscar Thornton. "Don't you go talkin' like that to your mother. Foolish! You apologize to 'er now."

"Aw, shucks, Dad. Mom knows I mean nothin' bad

against her. You yourself say women are like that. Always afraid of everything. If Mom had her way, she wouldn't let me ride to school even. Afraid her darling baby boy might hurt himself on the way. Horse might get scared an' go into a badger hole or just go crazy an' run away. If Mom had her way, she'd strap pillows on me, fore an' aft, to make sure I wouldn't hurt myself if I fell."

Oscar Thornton howled with laughter, but Billy's mother said quietly, "One awful woman, your mother."

"I have the best mother in the world," said Billy. "But she loves me too durn much, too much for my good, honest, Mother. Shucks, I got to grow up an' take care of myself."

"How you goin' to grow up if you get yourself killed?"

"But, Mom, I'll do nothin' that's even risky. I'll just be ridin' along over the prairie just as I've done ever since I was knee high to a grasshopper. I won't ever try to rope her till she's all tuckered out. All I need is three ponies, Dad. If you come out with the wagon and some hay, I'll leave the ponies at the wagon an' ride one of 'em for an hour or two at a time, keep chasin' the mare around in the direction of your camp, so I can quickly change ponies an' go on chasin' her. I won't let her stop even for a drink o' water, but as long as she keeps goin', I'll just take it easy after her."

"Where'll you get three ponies?" asked his father.

"I'll use my own, Perry, and Bess the cow pony'll do for a second. Dale Sorey'll lend me his Prince—"

"No, that won't do," said his father. "Then, if you get

the mare, Dale'll claim half share in her—that leads to trouble."

"Mr. Selden'll lend me his saddle pony, by gosh."

"He got a saddle pony, too?"

"Yes, an' he's anxious to have the wild mare captured. He says she drives him crazy, comin' around every night. He bought his saddle pony from Mark Skinner, an' he musta' been out all winter with the wild herd. Every time the white mare comes around, his pony wants to go off with her, and he near kills himself trying to break free."

"All right, you go ask Mr. Selden if he'll lend you his pony."

Billy jumped up, afire with excitement.

"You're crazy, Oscar Thornton," said his mother.

"That mare, Sarah, is worth three hundred dollars!"

"Dad," cried Billy, both hands on the doorknob, ready to bolt out to the barn. "The Mounty said to let him know if we're goin' after the mare. He said he'd give us two days. While I go back to the badlands, will you go to Steele's on the cow pony an' tell him? Let's be the first to ask permission to capture the white mare!"

"Good idea," said his father. "I'll go right away."

Billy ran for his pony to the barn. He ran so fast that he fell over Nellie, who got into his way. He scolded her roundly, then, thinking of the great adventure next day, he hugged her a moment and went on.

CHAPTER 3

A Real Friend

IT WAS quite late in the night by the time Billy Thronton arrived at the paleontologist's tent in the badlands near the river shore. In his enthusiasm over his great adventure of the next day, he had never doubted for a moment that the paleontologist would let him have his saddle pony. But as he approached the dark tent and saw clearly that Mr. Selden had already gone to bed, he was not only strongly averse to waking him up, but it began to seem bold to ask a man he had met only a few hours ago for the use of his horse.

Billy had stopped in the dark and was trying to make up his mind what to do when the scientist's pony, aware of another horse nearby, let out a shrill call. Billy's pony Perry pricked his ears and, before Billy could stop him, let out a loud piercing neigh in response. The tent flaps opened abruptly, and a shadowy figure came out, putting on a jacket as he came.

"Oh, hello, who's there?" he cried.

"It's me, Mr. Selden," began Billy. "I was here earlier in the evening."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Selden sleepily. "Will you come in?"

Billy dismounted and tied Perry's reins to a wheelbarrow, which lay upside down near the tent.

"I go to bed with the chickens," said the paleontologist when Billy, following him, had entered the tent.

"I'm awful sorry I woke you up," said Billy, sitting down on a box near the cot after Mr. Selden had lighted the lantern.

"Don't worry about that," said Mr. Selden. "I go to bed because I have nothing else to do. I don't like to read by lamp light. No, I came tearing out, because I thought the wild herd was around again."

"They don't come 'round so much since you been here, do they?"

"No," laughed Mr. Selden, "but I can't keep a fire going all night. That crazy horse of mine almost killed himself last night. I worry about him even in my sleep."

"You would like to get rid of the white mare, wouldn't you?"

"Would I!"

"I'm going to try to catch her tomorrow."

"You are?"

Billy told him how he and Ina had met the mounted policeman on their way home and that the officer had come out to shoot the mare down.

"That would be a crime!" said Selden.

"That's what I said."

"Who's going to help you?"

"My father."

Mr. Selden studied Billy a moment.

"I'll tell you what I can do for you," he said. "I can keep a good fire going all day."

"That would help," said Billy enthusiastically. "If we can keep her up on the plains, it'll help a lot."

"I'll build a whole series of fires along the edge of the canyon."

"Gee, Mr. Selden," said Billy. "That'd be a lot o' trouble."

"Oh, not so bad. I'm anxious to get rid of her. Believe me, it will be worth something to me to be able to sleep through my nights peacefully."

"I got everything set fine," began Billy haltingly, "but I need another saddle pony."

"Take Dino," said Selden with a laugh.

"Would you mind?"

"No, you won't hurt him any. He needs some exercise; I don't use him half enough. That's what's the matter with him."

"Gee, that's grand, Mr. Selden. Now I'm all set."

"What time are you going to start?"

"'Bout four in the morning."

"Well, boy, you better get some sleep," said Mr. Selden, starting out of the tent.

"I can get your saddle pony," said Billy. "Why don't you let me go get him?"

"You may not understand the fancy stake I have rigged up for him."

"Gee, I hate to be puttin' you to so much trouble."

"Don't you worry about that. I'm a stranger here; someday I may need some help, myself."

"Well, you sure call on me when I can help," said Billy.

"I will."

Mr. Selden led the way with his lantern to the grass

patch about a thousand feet from the tent. As soon as he saw them coming, Dino got excited and ran to the end of his rope, first to one side then to the other. Billy took hold of the rope and slowly drew the horse to him. When Dino was quite near, his eyes reflecting the light of the lantern, Billy stroked his face and slapped his shoulder affectionately.

"We're friends a'ready," he said.

"I can see you know how to handle horses."

"Been with 'em all my life."

Billy snapped off the rope that was fastened to Dino's halter and got a good hold on the halter ring. He led Dino back to the tent, and Mr. Selden walked beside him, talking to him.

"One thing, son," he said. "Don't you at any moment let anything that superstitious people have said about the ghost mare make you afraid."

"I won't," said Billy gratefully.

"There's nothing to that superstitious stuff. Only ignorant people believe those things. What they don't understand, they are afraid of. But intelligent people sometimes let such things bother them, even when they know better."

"I know," said Billy. "I know it's a lot o' foolishness, and yet, I think, supposin' something does happen."

"Don't you do it. Drive such foolish thoughts away. Of course, something is liable to happen. Something is always liable to happen. Generally nothing ever happens the way you think it's going to happen."

Billy laughed. He was flattered by the way this fine man talked to him.

"I think maybe you had better take my saddle too,"

said Mr. Selden when they got back to the tent. "Dino is used to it. You'll save time, too, by having your ponies always saddled and ready for you."

When he had saddled Dino, Billy said, "I think I'll ride him home tonight. See how he rides."

"You're not afraid of him?"

"Shucks, no," said Billy. "It may sound like braggin', Mr. Selden, but I'm not afraid of any horse. I began ridin' at four, and I guess maybe I never went a day without gettin' into the saddle."

Billy thanked the paleontologist again and, mounting Dino, rode away, leading Perry, to the side and behind him.

Mr. Selden called after him, "I'll be out there rootin' for you."

Billy rode off with a smile. Dino leaped forward as if he thought now he could escape to the wilds and the old herd, but Billy knew how to manage him. If it hadn't been for Perry dragging along behind, he would have let him go as fast as he pleased.

The night was beautiful and sharply cool. The sky was cloudless, and the river, reflecting it, radiated with a bright, silver coldness. The sandstone formations stood out heavy with shadow, but the bright new moon, which had risen above the canyon slopes, touched up their bulges and gave them a weird, eerie glow. They looked like odd-shaped gnomes in the night, watching and grinning.

Billy wished as he galloped along that Ina were with him. She loved these ghostly buttes by moonlight even more than he did. He wished, too, that Tom and Ina

were in on the great adventure of the next day, but the more he thought about it, the more difficult did such a partnership appear. His father, he knew, would be very much against it. Tom was not particularly interested in the capture of the ghost mare. Tom's father would worry so much about Tom's undertaking such a thing that the chances were he wouldn't allow it at all.

"But Dad's right," he thought when at last he could see the light in the Rayner farmhouse in the distance, "you can't cut a horse in two. No matter how pleasant it might be to have Ina and Tom in on it, how could we ever settle the ownership of the mare?"

When still a mile away from the Rayner farmyard, Billy turned off on the old Sullivan trail to avoid going through the Rayner yard. The Rayners, even Ina, might try to persuade him not to undertake the capture of the mare. The thought of surprising Ina fascinated him.

The Sullivan trail took him at least a quarter of a mile away from the Rayner farmhouse, but even at that he could hear Turk barking when he was at the nearest point to their yard. Assured that even with the new moon shining in the lower sky, he couldn't be seen from the Rayner house, he spurred Dino into a lope and passed safely out of sound.

When he reached his own farmyard, he found his father just dismounting from the cow pony, having at the moment come back from Steele's.

"Well, got it all settled," said Oscar Thornton, holding the reins of the cow pony and looking over the

paleontologist's saddle pony appraisingly in the dark. "I arranged with Sergeant McKenzie to let us try to get the mare tomorrow, and next day if need be. He said I was the first t' ask for the privilege, and the privilege is ours."

"Nobody else can try then, while we're tryin'?" asked Billy.

"You can't stop people from tryin'," said his father with the legal wisdom he believed he possessed. "But just the same, it is now officially known that the Throntons were first t' ask permission. That's enough. It's all we need."

But when they had attended to the ponies and gone into the house together, a surprise awaited them.

"Ina and Tom was here," said Billy's mother with significant emphasis. "You hadn't been gone half an hour, Oscar, when they came a-gallopin' into the yard. Tom came t'ask Billy to go in for catchin' the mare with 'im, in partnership. When I told Tom Billy'n his father'd already made plans to get the mare, Tom was pretty mad."

"Oh, Tom's always mad," said Billy.

"Yes," put in Oscar, "and there'd be plenty more madness if you let 'im go in with you. He wants you t' go in with him, because he knows you're better with the rope, Billy. I can't see what there'd be in it for you, havin' him along."

"Oh, he'd just be in my way," said Billy with self-confidence, "but I hate t' have 'im mad at me, 'bout it."

"You can't go makin' arrangements with them now," said his father, "but you can explain to 'im how it was;

you was away, came home late, too late to go to his house—you had to get up so early."

"Supposin' they come out there an' try to get the mare?" demanded Sarah Thornton.

"Well, let 'em do it," said her husband. "Billy don't have to fight with 'em. He can be pleasant an' all that, and when he gets a chance, rope the wild mare."

"There won't be any trouble," said Billy wistfully. "I just won't fight with 'im. If he comes along, I'll let 'im do so. I'll go on with my plans. I'll tell 'im I won't risk ropin' her till she's 'bout ready to collapse. But I don't think he'll even come out there. He's afraid of her."

"I wish you was more afraid of her," said his mother.

Billy smiled, but none too enthusiastically.

"So long as you make up your mind not to fight with him," said Oscar with emphatic finality, "there'll be no trouble. You just go about your business, Billy, your own way."

CHAPTER 4

Trouble

ALTHOUGH Billy had insisted that his mother need not get up to make breakfast for him, and although she was not at all pleased with his dangerous undertaking, when Billy came down into the kitchen at three o'clock in the morning, the fire was going, the lamp was lit, and the air was loaded with the smell of coffee and frying sausage.

"You're awful good, Mother," said Billy as he washed himself with the warm water she had ready for him.

"Promise me now that you will be careful, Billy," she muttered, a tear in her eye.

"Nothin' can happen to me, Mother," said Billy, taking hold of her by the shoulders and towering four inches above her. "I'm just going to keep chasin' her, easy-like. All I want to do is keep her a-goin' till she's ready to give up."

"That part's all right now," she answered, shaking off his hands and going back to the frying pancakes, "I kind o' made up my mind that you might be right about that. If you take care an' just go at her that way—but Tom's worryin' me. He's mad, and—"

"He's mad, Mother, but I ain't mad. I'm goin' to be just as friendly with Tom as always. I'll treat him the

same as always if he comes along. And, if I have t' share the white mare with him, I'll just have to, that's all. I won't fight with him."

"That's right, Billy," cried his mother, patting him on the back. "Just so you don't fight."

She set a platter full of pancakes on the table. Oscar Thornton came into the kitchen, rubbing his forehead sleepily.

"O' course, things can happen even then," said Sarah Thornton abruptly, as if she were just thinking out loud.

"Sure things c'n happen," growled Thornton. "They're always happening, aren't they? You keep yourself busy thinkin' of all that can happen, an' you won't have time t' run the house."

Billy smiled. He was grateful for his father's support. At the same time his mother's fears bothered him too. He ate silently and hurried out without waiting for his father to finish his breakfast.

He watered the three saddle ponies and fed them lavishly, putting saddles on all three of them. Then he watered, fed, and harnessed the two draft horses that were to pull the wagon. By that time his father came out.

While Oscar Thornton carried a sack of oats to the wagon out of which the horses were to be fed all day, Billy carried armfuls of hay and packed them into the wagon box. They filled a huge milk can with water and set that in the wagon box, in a corner, where the hay would hold it in place. Next, Billy got a canteen of water for his father and himself. On top of the hay, they laid out six large armfuls of stove wood. While his

father rounded up a good, strong halter and several long ropes, Billy got his field glasses.

On his way out, his mother handed Billy a huge bag, loaded with sandwiches, and a gallon jar of coffee, warning him once again to be careful and not to quarrel with Tom.

It was just growing light when the draft horses were hitched to the wagon. Perry and Bess were tied to the back of the wagon box, and while Billy mounted Dino, his father climbed into the wagon seat.

Sarah Thornton came out as they started off, and while Billy waved his good-by to her, he could hear her final admonition to be careful.

"I'll camp a short ways from the canyon, near where the Cassils Road goes down into the badlands," shouted Oscar through the rumbling noise of his wagon.

"I'll keep drivin' her your way circle-like if I can, so's I can change horses, soon's I have to," Billy yelled back.

With that he gave Dino free rein and galloped away over the prairie. Actually started on his great adventure, Billy threw off all the worries and fears his mother's concern had given him, in spite of himself. He knew horses and had always been able to manage them. He knew the prairie, and the prairie was magnificent in the early glow of the dawn. The stones and the rose bushes came out of the receding darkness, like familiar friends, awakening to greet him.

Tom would be mad, of course. He was used to that. But he was quite sure that Tom wouldn't venture out on his own account. Tom's father wouldn't let him, he was sure. One ride on the white mare after she was

tamed, and Tom would be all over his anger. Ina! There wasn't the slightest doubt in his mind but that Ina would be in complete sympathy with him.

He was just a bit concerned about the possibility that Dale Sorey had been taken with the inspiration to try to capture the wild mare. "But," he assured himself, "we got permission first, an' Dale prob'bly hasn't even heard the Mounty's out, yet."

Dino fairly ate up the prairie miles as the dawn light increased, and when the red sun appeared, peeking over the eastern horizon, he was sweeping around the pool in which Tom had ducked himself the day before. Billy chuckled. Tom was such a blunderbuss.

Billy headed for the hollow of the Sailor shanty. Nearly every time he had ever seen the wild mare, it had been in that hollow, near the pond, especially since Sailor had been killed. Sure enough, before he came near enough to the hollow to be able to look down into it, he heard a faint clatter of hoofs. Dino's head went up higher, his ears pricked sharply, and he increased his speed to the point of straining, as in a race.

When he got to the rim of the hollow, Billy saw the herd on the opposite side of it. The white mare in the lead swept past the sleepy shadow of Bob Sailor's shanty, like a streak of light.

The chase was on. Never had Billy experienced such a thrill in his life. He felt sure that his plans would work out perfectly. No one had come in ahead of him. Everything was going just right. The situation was his. If Tom or anybody else had any ideas of capturing the mare, they'd find him already in the process.

He did feel a bit uncanny as he passed the abandoned

shanty. Why did the wild mare cling to that shanty? But it was only natural that she should, he reasoned with himself. Animals always know when men have abandoned a place, and they always move in, too. There was no doubt but that she was now afraid of the bad-lands since Selden lived there. He drove these thoughts from his mind and sped away after the herd.

As soon as the herd had vanished in a distant hollow in the west, Billy veered slightly southward. He wanted to keep them on the open range that lay north of the canyon.

Dino didn't seem to like that. He wanted to go directly after the herd. He slowed down, pulled back his ears, and when Billy scolded him, shut his eyes as if to protect himself from a blow; but Billy had convinced him that he was master, and soon he was on his way as Billy wanted him to go.

Billy had discussed the matter often enough with everybody in the district to have a pretty good idea of the wild mare's domain. Mainly she clung to a circular stretch of open prairie some twenty-five miles in circumference, bounded in every direction by more densely settled country, with private ranges enclosed in barbed-wire fences.

Although he caught glimpses of her from time to time after he had turned northward, he knew that she would continue in that direction until she came to one of those fences. He knew that when she was obliged to turn, she wouldn't turn west, because there was a more densely populated district in that direction. So he continued north, going as slowly as he could get Dino to

go, watching the vast prairie convolutions, which rolled away before him, for any signs of life.

The dawn is breakfast time for horses on the range, and Billy knew that this herd was not anxious to exercise. They fled before him as soon as they heard him coming, but when they went down into a hollow where they couldn't see or hear him, they obviously stopped to graze. When they were out of his sight, Billy nudged Dino forward till he felt that he was near the herd again or heard the distant patter of their hoofs.

Some eight miles north of the canyon, Billy came to a hilltop and in the distance he could see the telltale line of posts of a barbed-wire fence. He stopped and with his field glasses swept the uninhabited prairie. As he turned his field glasses eastward, he saw the herd three quarters of a mile to the east, grazing on a ridge, the white mare distinctly on the alert, raising her head to look every other moment, like a bird.

"She's nervous now," thought Billy, dashing away after her, "and the more nervous she gets, the better. That'll keep her going."

When the wild herd had come to the end of their open range in the east, where their way was obstructed by farms and fences, they turned south again in the direction of the canyon. Their line of flight was parallel to the Cassils Road, but long before they came to the canyon they saw and smelled the smoke from Oscar Thornton's camp and turned southwest to avoid it.

Billy had thought that he might change ponies, but their breaking off that way made him reluctant to do so. Dino was not noticeably tired, though he had by

this time made over twenty miles according to Billy's rough estimate and had been on his way nearly three hours. Billy planned now to drive the herd so as to shorten the next round and to change ponies when he got near his father's camp again, no matter how the herd went. By that time, he reasoned, the herd would not be going so swiftly. From what he could see of them with his glasses, Billy could detect a weariness on their part, already. They wanted to stop and graze.

When he came within half a mile of the canyon, Billy was glad to discover the white mare in the distance, leading the herd away westward again. The one thing he had been afraid of was that in her desperation she might try to shake him by going down into the canyon. A few minutes later, however, he made out a wisp of smoke rising from a fire near the canyon edge, and as he raced westward he came upon two others. Mr. Selden had really gone to the trouble of building fires along the rim of the canyon, as he had said he would.

"Gee, he's one fine man," muttered Billy as he galloped along.

By the time he had completed his second round, though the white mare scrupulously avoided going near the Thornton camp, Billy was determined to change ponies, and allowing the herd to race away westward, out of sight, he trotted up to where his father sat near his fire to the side of his wagon.

His father jumped up to greet him and took the reins from him as Billy dismounted.

"You shouldn'ta' run him long, Billy," said Oscar Thornton, wiping the perspiration off Dino's sleek neck. "You been goin' steady, near five hours."

Billy found himself panting for breath as he explained.

"You're wearin' yourself out, too," said his father, reprovingly.

Billy laughed.

"Oh, no, Dad, it's fun!" he cried. "Even Dino thinks it's fun, don't you, Dino?"

Billy slapped the pony affectionately on the rump, and as his father led Dino off to water and feed him, Billy took down the canteen and drank a quart of water himself. Then putting one of his mother's sandwiches in each of his coat pockets, he put a third into his mouth. He just held the sandwich with his teeth while he mounted Perry, his own pony, and then began eating it as he dashed away again.

He struck out directly for the Bob Sailor shanty, but when he came to the hollow, the herd was not there. "She's too wise to come back to the place where I first chased her," he said to himself.

He went on as far west as he had yet gone that morning, and seeing no sign of the herd, turned north. In that direction he rode along slowly for an hour before he spotted them again on a ridge, two miles away. He took after them at once and raced almost all the way to the Cassils Road, before he spied them again. This time they were in a hollow about a quarter of a mile away, and he was delighted to see that only a few of the herd were now left with the white mare.

"The rest've dropped out somewhere," he said to himself as he gave chase again, "but I don't know where. I've seen neither hide nor hair of a one of 'em."

From time to time, Billy caught glimpses of a stray

horse here and there in the distance, generally near some hollow toward the center of the big range. They were just wise enough to keep to where they felt he was not doing his chasing, and he hoped that one by one the horses still running with the mare would drop out in the same way.

Toward noon, Perry began showing signs of wearing out, and Billy started working the mare toward the canyon and his father's camp. It was after one o'clock before he was near enough to his father to be willing to risk changing horses again.

Perry was white with foam when he wearily trotted into camp.

"You run the ponies too much," his father warned, taking Perry from him.

"You can't get around here just when you want to, Dad," said Billy, making for the coffee jar. "If it weren't for Mr. Selden's pony, I don't know's I'd ever make it. Perry isn't half as good a pony as Dino, an' Bess, you know, isn't half as good as Perry."

"Why do you go so fast?" demanded his father. "You said you'd go easy."

"I didn't believe the wild mare'd be so tricky. Gee, she's wise, Dad. At first, on Dino, I had no trouble keepin' after her. She's just made up her mind t' shake me, an' she knows durn well I ain't on so good a horse. She knows I can't keep up, so she goes faster. She get's down into a hollow an' then she takes off backward. I go on till I see her two or three miles behind me; then I turn around. Before I know it, she's off the other way again."

"I don't care for tricky horses," said Oscar Thornton, going back to his fire.

"Oh, yes, Dad, but she isn't just tricky; she's wise."

Billy gulped down two cups of coffee. Then supplying himself with three sandwiches again, he mounted Bess and started away once more.

By this time there was no sign of the herd anywhere. Now that the wild mare had taken to trying to escape him by tricking him, there was no telling what direction she had gone, to throw him off her trail. He began to feel that she might even by this time be desperate enough to have taken to the badlands despite Selden's fires. He had struck out for the Sailor hollow, thinking that they might have gone down there for a drink, when as he looked off toward the canyon he saw a man at the rim, just where the Bob Sailor trail turned down into it. Through his field glasses he saw that it was Mr. Selden and decided to turn toward him. Selden might know whether the herd had gone down into the canyon.

"Well!" shouted Selden, as he approached. "How are you making it?"

"Sure lucky I borrowed your Dino," said Billy. "Don't know what I'd 'a' done without him. He's been with the herd; he can smell 'em miles away."

"They were coming down here into the canyon about fifteen minutes ago," said Selden, "when they spied me coming up the slope."

"I thought she would be tryin' that!" cried Billy.

"I don't think she'll try it again, though, now that she's seen me down here."

"Your fires helped an awful lot, too."

"You think you've made a dent on her?"

"I don't think she'll last as long as I thought she would."

"Don't let the Rayner kid get ahead of you, now," laughed Selden.

Billy's lower jaw dropped.

"Is he about?"

"Haven't you seen him?" asked Selden, a look of surprise on his face.

"No!"

"He's been here since ten o'clock. His father is with him. The old man is more excited about it than the boy. The boy's a kind of blusterer, isn't he? He's evidently strong on what big things he is going to do. I don't think he is half as anxious to do them as he pretends. His father says it's between you and his boy, and he's going to let you two have it out by yourselves."

Billy shrugged his shoulders and smiled. Inwardly he was not feeling much like smiling. He was very weary by this time. He had slept so little the night before. He still had a long day ahead of him, and because he was already almost worn out, the prospective struggle with Tom worried him.

"I better get along on my way," he said.

"Don't worry about that Rayner boy," said Mr. Selden. "I don't think he could catch a rabbit."

Billy laughed. Now he felt better. Nevertheless, he was anxious to get close to the wild mare again, and as he forced his cow pony to go as fast as she could, he kept looking anxiously in every direction for signs of Tom or any of the wild herd.

He went all the way up to the north end of the circu-

lar range on which the wild mare ran all morning, without seeing anything of her, of the herd, or Tom. But when he turned back, now feeling that Tom had stolen a march upon him, he came upon half a dozen of the wild herd in a hollow.

At sight of him, these horses, who had been going south, broke into two groups, one going to the left, the other to the right. As the white mare was not among them, Billy raced on southward. A mile farther south, he came upon another group of the herd, and these ran off toward the west.

Billy was now quite sure that he would soon come upon the mare and the remnant of her herd. He could almost sense them beating away over the spaces out of sight. But he went along mile after mile without seeing them and began to worry.

Then he came to the ridge from which he could see the pool Tom had foolishly splashed through the day before. He saw Tom there now on the other side of the pool, galloping around it. The white mare was coming up, as if from the pool, right toward him. To the side the four wild horses who had been with her were loping away southward.

The white mare was coming toward him so fast that she was almost within a hundred feet of Billy, before she became aware of him. She stopped a second, and he could see her great sides throbbing, then she swerved eastward, and raced away.

Billy turned after her, but he allowed Bess to trot slowly in order to give Tom a chance to catch up with him. He was tired and weary and regretted the contention that had arisen between him and the Rayners. He

decided to tell him that he was ready to make a partnership of the chase.

"Hello, Tom," he began, turning to him, but Tom would not even look his way.

He swept past him and on, after the wild mare, as if he hadn't seen him. Bess was barely able to keep up with Tom's pony. Billy tried to think how he might get Tom to understand that he meant to let him join him in the capture. But as they raced northward, now in a sort of triangle with the mare at the apex, Billy began to resent Tom's attitude. He could feel that Tom regarded himself as having an advantage over him because of his better pony. He was sure that Tom would now spurn his offer.

The farther they went, the more apparent was that advantage, and because he was well-nigh worn out, the more bitter did Billy's resentment become. Bess exasperated him. She was older than Perry or Dino, but she hadn't gone a third of the distance they had, and she was acting as if she were going to collapse. She snorted and sneezed and even pretended to be limping, falling back farther and farther. Tom and the white mare were getting so far ahead that Billy began to feel ashamed of dragging along behind.

When the white mare, in an attempt to get farther away from Tom, tore through a hollow, coming out a mile to the west, Tom turned diagonally to head her off. That gave Billy a chance to get nearer to them on their return trip southward. He tried to get closer to Tom. He wanted to try to make him understand that they would have a better chance of capturing the mare without trouble if they'd go at her less intensively, wait

until she was completely worn out. But the more Billy tried to get nearer Tom, the more Tom seemed to try to get away from him. And again Bess began lagging behind.

Billy was ashamed of his position, and his shame increased his resentment against Tom. As he struggled along behind, he was afraid that some of the district folks would be out on their ponies to watch the capture. He could imagine how they'd laugh, if they saw Tom close to the mare, while he was dragging along behind.

Finally Billy gave up the attempt to keep up with the chase. Bess was unmistakably played out. While he was disgusted with her, he was sorry for her, and he turned in the direction of his father's camp.

It was after four o'clock when at last he came limping into camp and dismounted wearily. As his father took the reins and led Bess to the back of the wagon box, he said reprovingly, "I keep a-tellin' you not to go so fast, an' you run the ponies to death."

"It ain't my fault, Dad," panted Billy. "Tom's out an' he's goin' after the mare as fast as he can make his pony go. I tried to get near him to tell 'im my idea of the best way to get her, but he won't talk to me. I was for tellin' him we'll share the white mare, but he's so durn mad he won't let me get near him."

"Don't try to get near him," cried Oscar Thornton angrily. "They was over here, both of 'em, an' they started tellin' me what they was goin' t' do. If they'd a-come along like neighbors an' said they had ought to have a share in this, I'd a-said, I'll talk to the boy an' see that he gives you a share. But comin' along an'

tellin' me what they was a-goin' t' do; I just told 'em off. I told 'em we got first right to capture the mare from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Tom, he butted in. Said the Mounty hasn't any right to give permission. I went on, 'Billy's been out since four o'clock this morning; you come along at ten.' "

As his father talked, Billy gulped down some more coffee. Then coiling his lariat carefully, he ran to Dino and untied him and mounted.

"If that's the way they feel about it," he said, as he was about to start off again, "let the best man win."

His father quickly untied Perry and mounted him.

"I ain't goin' to do any chasin' with you," he said. "This job is yours. You go on ahead without me. I'm just goin' t' ride along an' look on."

Billy left his father far behind in a few minutes. A feeling of satisfaction welled up in him with the strength he got from Dino's swiftness. Now he was the equal of Tom in speed, and as to his ability to swing the lariat, well, he'd take his chances with Tom under any circumstances.

Again Billy struck out in the direction of the Sailor hollow, but when he saw no sign of Tom or any horses down at the pond, he went on to the west, going slowly and looking through his field glasses. About a mile beyond the Sailor hollow, Billy saw Tom riding slowly southward fully two miles away. He was evidently going back to his father's camp to change ponies, and it was clear that the mare was somewhere in the opposite direction.

Billy turned northward and was glad to drop out of sight in another hollow. By the time he got to the next

hilltop, Tom was out of sight. Spurring Dino into a lope, he raced along, searching the prairie before him. He saw nothing anywhere until he came to a long ridge some two miles farther north. There, when he first spied them, he saw what looked like the entire wild herd, standing and looking toward the white mare, who was coming down toward them. She was going very much unlike the white mare he had seen racing before. She was unmistakably tired and not even as alert; it was not until the herd had seen him coming and scattered like rats in every direction that the white mare turned to look back.

Billy struck out after her, and by the time he got to the next hilltop, he had her running alone barely two hundred feet ahead of him. Completely pleased with the way the thing had turned out, Billy took after her leisurely, driving her as far northward as he could. When a barbed-wire fence finally forced her to turn eastward, Billy kept slightly to the south of her, hoping that he might possibly drive her, at the northeast corner of the open range, toward his own farmyard. The mare was now so tired that she ran no faster than he forced her to, slowing down as soon as he slowed down. But when they came to the open space that would have taken her toward the Thornton farm, no matter what Billy did, she refused to go on northward there. When he galloped to the right, to head her off from going south, she swerved in desperation to the left, panting so loud for breath that he could hear her.

This was disappointing to Billy, because he had hoped that by getting her out of Tom's reach, he would avoid the clash he feared when time came to rope her.

She seemed so exhausted that several times Billy thought he might try roping her, but every time he came within a few feet of her she showed how strong she still was, leaving him behind in a few minutes.

Before she had half completed the round this time, the wild mare struck out diagonally as if she were heading for the Sailor shanty, and half a mile from it Tom appeared on a fresh horse.

The mare swerved to the side and turned northward again, and as both Tom and Billy took after her, Billy galloped up to Tom. Racing along with him, he shouted, "It's better, Tom, to take it easy; let's get her tuckered out."

"So you c'n sneak in an' get her away from me?" yelled Tom.

"I'm no sneak!"

"Sure sneaked off last night."

"You lie, Tom; you say I sneaked."

"Call me a liar, hey?"

"I said if you say I sneaked off."

"You did sneak off."

"You are lyin' then."

"I'm not lyin' when I—when I tell you, you'll never get that mare."

"You can't stop me."

"Just you wait an' see."

For fully five miles they raced along side by side, Billy trying to think of what he might say that would make Tom more reasonable, but at the same time resenting more and more bitterly what Tom had said so far. When the mare again turned southward, they widened behind her as if further talk were useless.

By the time they again approached the canyon, there was a distinct feeling of evening in the air. All the wilderness seemed to have gone out of the white mare, and while she kept ahead of her pursuers, she ran more like a horse that was working than one that was trying to escape anything. As she came to the end of her great strength, she kept changing the pattern of her attempt to keep out of reach. She seemed to run blindly, and instead of going in circles she was running along an irregular spiral.

From time to time as Billy continued after her, constantly watching Tom and keeping abreast of him, he saw riders on horseback in the near distance, and he realized that they were being watched, that this performance was not without an audience. If there had been no ill will between Tom and himself, he might have enjoyed the excitement of it. However, at this point he was almost too tired to enjoy the chase at all, and he wished it were over with.

If he led out as much as a yard ahead of Tom, Tom lashed at his pony to catch up to him, and the mare, despite her unmistakable weariness, came alive at once and shot forward. It looked like an all-night struggle when, as Dino suddenly slowed down a moment to sneeze, Billy saw Tom leap ahead and begin whirling his lariat loop.

They were now down a hollow, almost in the exact center of the range over which Billy had galloped all day long, and Tom was no more than fifty feet behind the white mare.

Billy expected the white mare to leap forward again as Tom approached her, but when she came to the slope

of the next hill, she just did not have the strength to run. Tom drove in madly, ahead of him. Billy saw him whirl the lariat rope over his head. He was worried about it and spurred Dino to get him there, but he could see that Tom was too nervous to be effective.

Billy controlled himself. His eyes dilated and he forced all fear and excitement from himself. He decided quickly that as Tom was wrong *he* must be right. He tied the end of his reins to his saddle horn, trusting his knees, which he clamped to the body of his pony, to help steer him. Then, carefully whirling the loop around his head with his right hand, holding the coil loosely with his left, he spurred Dino. Dino glided past Tom. The loop sailed from Billy's hand and lowered gracefully upon the wild mare's head.

Before Billy realized that he had made a perfect shot, the rope pulled rapidly out of his hand. He let it go without looking at the white mare. When there were but a few feet of it left, he began frantically winding it around his saddle horn. He became aware of something brushing by him. Dino got frightened and pulled back. The rope tautened between the white mare and the saddle horn.

Then it happened, so swiftly that it was unbelievable. Billy first felt a blow at the rope, which almost pulled the saddle horn out of the saddle under him. The next thing he knew, he saw Tom's horse running away, the reins dangling from his bridle bit. To the side and behind him, Billy saw Tom rolling on the ground.

Billy didn't even have time to take a good look at Tom. The moment the wild mare felt the rope on her neck, her frenzy gave her back her strength. She reared

on her hind legs, and as Dino sprang toward her, she dropped forward and ran as if she hadn't run that day at all.

When she got to the top of the hill, her hoof struck a stone. Billy heard the clash of hoof on stone and saw the mare go down on her knees. First, she made an attempt to get up; then, suddenly changing her mind, she went down on her side.

Billy turned in the saddle and took his first chance to look back. He was relieved to see several men on horseback where Tom had fallen, but he was so agitated, he couldn't see clearly. He felt as though there were a film over his eyes. His blood pounded in his temples, and his hands, despite himself, trembled.

Before he could look a second time, the mare was up again. Away they went down the next slope, the mare in the lead, Dino now unwillingly dragging after her.

When she started up the next hill, however, she went so slowly that Dino almost touched her with his nose. Billy was obliged to gather up the slack of the rope to keep Dino from stepping on it.

He had the white mare! But he was not happy now, in this possession of her. Tom might have been seriously hurt. He might even be killed! Boys fall off of their horses, on the prairie, he told himself, hundreds of times without being killed. Nevertheless, a feeling of revulsion began creeping over him. He almost felt he didn't want the wild mare any more. She had caused a great deal of trouble. His mother had warned him. Something dreadful did happen. Selden might be wrong.

He couldn't think very clearly. These thoughts just

broke into his mind and flashed out before he could consider them. He was so tired and befuddled that he wished he could lie down on the ground and go to sleep. He was cold, too. A wind had risen with the lowering of dusk. It penetrated his clothes and dug at his body, which was wet with perspiration.

He was startled by the sound of hoofbeats. The wild mare spurted forward at once with alarm. Billy turned in his saddle to look back, and he saw his father, on Perry, come up beside him.

"Well, you got 'er!" shouted his father, against the wind.

Billy turned and looked at his father. He was relieved by the smile he saw on his face and yet amazed that he could smile.

"How's Tom?" he cried.

"Oh, I don't think he's very badly hurt," shouted his father. "O' course, John, he's goin' t' make all he can out of it. How did Tom fall? Did you see?"

"He tried to get in my way," shouted Billy. "He swung his lariat loop an' missed 'er. When I rode in to rope 'er, he leaped in ahead of me. But I had 'er, an' he rode right into my rope. It knocked him off. I couldn't stop t' see about him."

"He'll be all right."

Billy almost cried for joy.

"Gee!" he shouted, now concerned about the white mare. "The rope, I'm afraid, is chokin' her."

His father had fallen back a few feet. Riding forward again, up to Billy, he said, "Never mind. Let it choke her. She's wise enough to learn that if she won't pull, it won't choke her."

It was hard to hold a conversation with the wild mare pulling and the wind blowing, and Dino now so tired and disgusted that he kept tossing his head in protest. The next time he turned, Billy saw his father going back to his camp. He was already a quarter of a mile away.

Billy let the mare go as she pleased, as long as she was going northward and in the direction of his home, but when she attempted to turn around, he drove her forward.

At first the white mare resisted, but when Dino went on, pulling hard on the rope, she couldn't stand the pain and ran forward to slacken the rope.

Every time she stopped to hold back, the rope would hurt her, and she would break into a feeble run. One time as the rope slackened Billy saw her seize it with her teeth. At once he spurred Dino and pulled the rope out of her teeth, the pull obviously hurting more than the choking of the loop. In her bewilderment, she didn't see the stone in front of her, and as her hoof struck it, she went down again.

This time she stretched out with a groan and lay there. Billy drove Dino back toward her, so the rope would not be tight, and remained standing there to let her, and Dino too, rest a bit.

He could tell by her noisy breathing that she wasn't dead, and though he didn't like the idea that the loop was so tight around her neck, he was sure it wasn't tight enough really to hurt her when the rope wasn't pulled.

The rest did him good too, although he was cold and uncomfortable. When she still lay flat on her side after a fifteen-minute wait, Billy began to worry. Her great

sides were throbbing, and her breath came rasping. He took hold of the loose rope and began swinging it gently. The mare lifted her head in alarm and pushed her front legs forward to rise, but seeing that nothing further was happening to her, she pulled her legs back and stretched out again.

"Awful tired aren't you, poor thing," said Billy, laughing.

He could see her ears prick at the sound of his voice, even in the dim light.

"You're all right," said Billy, "let's get goin', and when we get home, you can rest as long as you want to."

Again he whirled the rope gently, and this time she got to her feet. He let her stand still a few minutes to get her breath and her bearings, then he started forward. She, of course, didn't want to go forward; she wanted to go back. Again she braced herself on all four legs and resisted his pull on the rope, but she didn't resist for very long. As soon as the rope really hurt her, she jumped forward and from that time on until they got within a few feet of the farmyard she saw to it that she kept near enough to Dino to escape the pull of that rope.

The wind had been blowing from the west all along, but by the time they neared the farmyard it began to turn southward. As soon as the white mare smelled the farmyard and heard the barking of the dog, she began to resist again with all the violent wildness she had exhibited when he first roped her. She tossed her head and snorted and pulled, running first to one side and then the other, indifferent to pain. Suddenly she went down on her side. It was too dark now to see just what

had happened, but Billy suspected that she had gone down deliberately.

Try as he would, he could not get her to rise to her feet. He even moved toward her, holding on to the rope, till he was near enough to touch her with his hand, but she did not stir. He could hear by her breathing that she was alive, but he was not sure whether she was playing possum or completely exhausted.

He was still too far away to call to his mother for help, and he did not dare leave her there with Dino, tied though she was. Fortunately he was not far from the roadway on which his father would be coming.

He decided to wait there for him, because he felt that even if he could force her up again he could not handle her alone, frightened as she would naturally be, coming into a farmyard for the first time.

It was fully half an hour later before Oscar Thornton's wagon came rumbling along. The sound of the wagon startled the white mare to her feet again. Billy quickly remounted, but when he started forward, the mare braced herself on her legs, groaning as she resisted, but refusing to go.

Oscar Thornton stopped his wagon on the roadway and came running over to Billy. A few yards away, he stopped.

"Keep her there," he shouted. "I'll be back in a jiffy."

He drove off in his wagon into the farmyard. In a few minutes he came trotting over on Perry. He rode around behind the white mare and touched her rump with a whip. That frightened her, and she lunged forward. Billy, on Dino, immediately dashed ahead as

far as the rope would let him. When the wild mare stopped again, Billy's father rode up to her, but he didn't have to touch her. She didn't wait for his whip.

Slowly, by spurts, they moved her into the farm-yard. Billy's mother came out.

"Lord save us!" she cried. "You got her!"

"Better get into the house, Sarah," shouted her husband. "Take that crazy dog in with you."

Sarah seized Nellie by the collar and pulled her into the house.

The wild mare seemed to calm down slightly. With the rope chafing her neck, the stinging whip threatening her from behind, she moved forward a few feet at a time.

In that way they led her toward the corral and through the open gateway. In the confinement of the log walls, she became panicky again for a moment. But Oscar Thornton quickly closed the huge gate, and she backed into a corner, facing her tormentors and gasping for breath. She was completely exhausted.

Billy waited until his father had ridden out of the corral and carefully shut the big gate; then he dismounted. When his father came back into the corral, Billy untied the rope from the saddle horn, and his father led Dino away.

How he was going to get the rope off her neck, Billy did not know. He waited for his father to come back again, and then he slowly moved toward the mare, pulling on the rope, hand over hand. He hoped she might be so exhausted that she would let him get near enough for him to get hold of the loop, but when he

was a few feet away from her, his father shouted, "Cut the rope where you are and let her go!"

Billy pulled out his scout knife, and sawing away at the rope, an inch or so above his left hand, he severed it. When he turned and shambled off to the gate, the wild mare let out a blast of a sigh.

Billy lumbered blindly toward the house. The relief he experienced, no longer having to watch the mare or guard against her, seemed to put out the light in his mind. When he got into the house, he could hear his mother lamenting his tiredness, but he wasn't awake enough even to hear her words.

"Yes, Mother," he mumbled, smiling to reassure her. "I'm too tuckered out to eat. I want nothin' but t' get into bed."

Sarah Thornton followed her son all the way to the stairs, begging him to eat something, at least to take a bowl of soup. But Billy was too tired even to refuse again. With great relief he heard his father calling her back as he labored up to his room, "Let 'im alone; he c'n eat a good breakfast."

CHAPTER 5

Superstition

BILLY THORNTON was awakened by a shrill whinny, which vibrated through his garret bedroom and raced away like an echo into the great distances of the prairie. When he opened his eyes, there was a patch of sunlight on his rough-board floor.

He had intended to get up early and to run out and see what the mare was like, after having recuperated from the exhaustion of the day before. The sunlight gave him a feeling of lateness. He had slept very hard. Was the wild mare in his corral just a dream?

He was still rather tired, and although eager to get up and go out, he lay listlessly a moment longer. He heard her whinny again. It rose shrill and sharp into the air, vibrating with intensity.

Now Billy leaped from his bed and ran to the window that looked out upon the corral. There she really was. She was standing in the corner of the corral that was farthest away from the house, the piece of rope still hanging from her neck. Her beautiful head high above the corral wall, her eyes glaring into the distance, every graceful curve of her white body expressed the helpless fury with which she endured her captivity.

Billy glanced in the direction in which she was look-

ing. On a ridge that was off on the very horizon, he saw the tiny uncertain forms of horses running, while several horsemen were pursuing them. Some of her old herd had been around in the night, looking for her. Apparently the horsemen had expected them to do so and had come for them.

As Billy dressed hurriedly, he hoped one of these men had stopped at the house and left some news of how Tom was.

"Why didn't you call me, Mother?" he asked when he broke into the kitchen and saw by the clock that it was already eight.

"Call you?" she repeated. "Did you need callin'? Was you able to sleep at all, last night?"

Having heard him come down the stairs, she had begun frying pancakes for him. The smell of coffee and bacon was already in the air.

"All the crazy goin's on!" she said, expertly turning one cake after another. "The old ghost mare shriekin' all night long, the wild herd stampedin' over the yard, tryin' t' get to 'er, Nellie barkin' her head off— You musta' been tired, boy, t' sleep through a night like that. Dad got up half a dozen times t' chase 'em off."

Billy wanted to ask her whether they had heard anything about Tom, but he was afraid his father might not have told her about the accident, preferring to keep it from her for a while.

He ate his breakfast as rapidly as he could, and when he started out, his mother protested, "You're so excited over that ghost mare; you can't even take time to eat."

"Gee, Mother, quit callin' her ghost mare."

Outdoors, Billy found his father at the corral gate, one foot on the lowest log, staring at the white mare. The wild mare stood backed into the farthest corner glaring at them.

"You can believe what you like about that mare," began his father without turning when Billy had come up, "but she ain't no ordinary horse. You'll find her wiser'n the devil when you go to trainin' 'er."

"Wise horses are easier t' train, aren't they?" asked Billy.

"I don't know," said his father in a preoccupied manner. "A wise critter can be awful tricky."

Billy gazed at her. The mare had turned her head and glanced across the plains, as if concerned about the herd.

"She just looks like a wild horse that's been caught to me," he said. "Heard anything 'bout Tom?"

"Nobody's been here," said his father. "You ain't told your mother about Tom, have you?"

"No. I wasn't sure you wanted me to."

"No use worryin' her till we know what's happened. Half our neighbors been along here for their horses; not one's stepped in."

"What are they afraid of?" demanded Billy. "Afraid the ghost mare'll bite 'em?"

"Folks are that way."

Suddenly Nellie, who had apparently been out chasing gophers, came bounding across the fields toward the two. The wild mare became alarmed at once. As Nellie reached Billy, the white mare tried to back farther into the corner of the corral, and her eyes glared with terror.

Nellie crept under the lowest log of the gate and facing the mare let out a violent barrage of barks. The mare lifted a front leg and pawed the earth threateningly.

"You come back here, Nellie," cried Billy with pretended anger. "You get into the house."

Even after Nellie had slunk away toward the house, Billy continued scolding her loudly, watching the white mare all the time through the side of his eye.

"Don't you think, Dad, she looks as though she knows I've taken her part?"

"I think you better go over to Rayners' an' ask 'bout Tom," said his father, as if he hadn't heard his question. "No more'n decent, you do so."

"I mean to," said Billy. "I have t' take Dino back to Mr. Selden. I'll go by way of Rayners'."

Billy went off to the barn, where he saddled both Dino and Perry. When he came out of the barn, leading the two ponies, Dino called to the white mare. The white mare came running toward them to the nearest of the corral walls. She made the yard vibrate with her replies.

Just to see what she would do, Billy led the two ponies toward her, but as soon as they neared her, the white mare raced off to the farthest corner again.

Billy was glad to note that his father looked on with interest, and he was happy to see him smile. Whatever his father thought about her being a ghost mare, he was a good horseman and was as much interested in her as he was.

Billy mounted Dino and rode away, pulling the unwilling Perry behind him. Till he was halfway to the

Rayners' farmyard, he could hear the white mare calling to Dino. But as he approached the Rayner yard, Billy began worrying about Tom. How would John Rayner react to his friendly visit? Would they let him see Tom so that he could explain things to him? Ina might be angry at him. Would Tom be in bed? The thought that Tom might be crippled was terrible to contemplate, and he was almost afraid to face them.

As he approached the familiar yard and Turk came out to meet him, barking with an excitability that seemed unusual, Billy's heart began to beat so fast and his breath came so hard he was afraid he would be unable to talk intelligibly. But when he brought his ponies to a halt in the middle of the farmyard, he felt an unmistakable air of abandonment about the place.

Suddenly the summer-kitchen door opened, and Pete Striker came limping out. Pete stopped and looked up at Billy, as if he thought his coming to the Rayner yard was a piece of effrontery.

"Hello, Pete," said Billy, his voice betraying his surprise to find him there.

"The boy was pretty badly hurt," said Pete, without replying to Billy's greeting. "Trot Siegert drove 'em all int' Calgary. They had t' take the kid to the hospital. Weren't able t' do nothin' for 'im in the small hospital at Cassils—he's that bad."

"Gosh!" cried Billy. "What happened to 'im?"

"What happened to 'im?" repeated Pete. "You had ought t' know that!"

"I mean, just how was he hurt?"

"How do I know?" said Pete contemptuously. "I'm no doctor."

But Billy had to have what facts he could; he could hardly endure the suspense.

"Where did he seem to be hurt—the head, the leg, the back?"

"How do I know. I wasn't there."

"You saw them bring him in, didn't you?"

"I did not."

Billy looked at him, his lips tight with exasperation.

"All I know," began Pete, softened a bit, "was when Jake Mort come over last night after they was all gone an' said Tom Rayner was hurt by the ghost mare an' was took into Calgary hospital. Jake said John told him to tell me to come an' take care o' the place, like last year when the Rayners went t' Calgary for the county fair."

"Well, thank you, Pete," said Billy, bewildered and badly worried.

"Nothin' t' thank me about," grinned Pete.

Billy trotted away. He would have galloped to get away from Pete as fast as possible, but Perry just would not go faster than a trot, pulling so hard on the reins, he almost pulled Billy off the saddle.

When he had put at least a mile of clean prairie air between himself and Peter Striker, Billy was better able to subdue his frenzy. Pete had tried to make things look as bad as possible. Tom could have been taken to the hospital in Calgary and still not be as bad as Pete made it appear. The little hospital at Cassils was good mainly for emergencies. Everybody in the district went to Calgary with most fairly important cases. The Rayners especially. They were reputed to be so concerned about each other that they were in the habit of rushing

to a doctor every time one of them got a sliver into his finger.

But Billy was worried none the less. Not only was it just as possible that Tom had really been seriously hurt, but now it did appear that evil followed every attempt to capture the ghost mare. He still wanted to fight this feeling, because his reason told him that it was wrong. He was eager to get to Mr. Selden and learn what *he* thought about it.

The prairie seemed endless that sad morning. Even when he came at last to where the Cassils Road drops down the canyon slope and lies like a thin gray snake across the badlands and the river, he had the feeling that the paleontologist's camp was still many miles away. When he came to the now familiar tent and found it abandoned, too, he began to fear that there *was* a sort of evil conspiracy working against him.

He tied Perry to one of the strong ropes that held the tent fly over the tent, sure that Perry was too lazy to pull very hard at it. Removing Dino's saddle from him, he led him away to the grass patch. There he tied him to the stake.

On his way back to Perry, Billy decided that Selden might have gone into Calgary with the Rayners. Now he felt sure that Tom had been seriously hurt.

He mounted Perry and started back toward the road, intending now to go to Trot Siegert's. Calgary was less than two hundred miles away, and with an automobile the trip was made in a few hours. Trot might have come back last night, and if he had, he would know just how seriously hurt Tom was.

But as he started away from the tent, Dino rent the air with his frenzied protests against being left alone.

"It's funny," thought Billy. "Horses seem to hate to go, when you drive 'em off somewhere, but he'd rather go with me than stay there by himself. They sure hate to be alone. They don't talk, but they like company. Just bein' together. He wants Perry back there with 'im more'n me, but he'd rather have me than to be alone."

The farther Billy went, the worse Dino felt, his unhappy whinnies shooting across the canyon like rockets and echoing back from the other side. Billy turned in his saddle to look back at him, somewhat afraid that he might break free. As his eyes traveled swiftly over the distant sandstone formations, he discovered a tiny black speck moving on top of one of them.

He turned Perry about quickly and started westward along the river, his eyes searching the sandstone streaks and points ahead of him as he went.

When he came to the tent again and went on, Dino again shattered the silences of the canyon with his neighing to him. Again Billy saw the speck moving on top of the butte, and now he was sure that it was the paleontologist up there, concerned about Dino's calling.

Billy rode all the way to the trail that led up the canyon wall to the Sailor shanty without seeing the paleontologist. Leaving the river shore there, he wound his way in and out among the formations searching for him. Then when he was almost in despair of finding him, he discovered him on top of one of the

formations, so near that he could see the smile on his face.

Selden motioned to him to go around to the north side of the butte, and when Billy did so, he saw a steep incline between two buttresses of sandstone that led up to the top, where the paleontologist was standing and waiting for him.

Billy threw the reins over Perry's head and dismounting left him there in a small patch of grass. Then he raced up the incline. When he got to the top, Mr. Selden seized his hand.

"So you got the wild mare!" he cried. "Congratulations!"

Billy hardly knew what to say. He was thinking of Tom.

"Come on down here with me," said Selden, "so I can go on working while you talk to me."

The incline down into the hollow on the other side of the butte was so steep Billy had to sit down and slide in places. Below, Mr. Selden said, as he resumed the digging he had been doing, "Well, you had a very exciting day yesterday."

"I sure hope it turns out nothin' worse than just exciting."

"I don't think Tom was seriously hurt. I saw him and examined him."

"You did!" cried Billy eagerly.

"Yes, when John came back for his wagon, he saw me and asked me if I wouldn't go and look at the boy. He was half crazy with worry."

"Was Tom unconscious?" asked Billy.

"Oh, no. He was hurt, of course. You can't be thrown

off a saddle like that without being hurt. There were no broken bones, I am sure. If he has a few fractures, they'll heal. He's a good, strong healthy boy."

"Was John mad?"

"Oh, he's got a temper, that man. He hurled threats around pretty freely, but once he gets all that out of his system, he'll be all right. Tom's pride was hurt more painfully than his body."

"It was his own fault," said Billy. "He had a good chance to get the mare. He tried and missed. I didn't interfere when he tried, but when he missed and saw me comin' he wanted to get in my way. But my loop caught her, an' when he dashed forward to try to get into my way, he ran into the rope. That knocked him off. I don't know what he thought he was doin', but he was crazy to try it."

"He tells another story, naturally, but your explanation sounds more reasonable," said Selden. "He claims that you raced around in front of him and lassoed the mare while he was trying to. He says nothing about having tried and missed."

"Oh, o' course not!" cried Billy excitedly. "He wouldn't tell that. But he did try and miss. His loop struck the mare on the side o' the neck. He pulled the rope up to try again, but is that fair? I let him try once; it was my turn next."

"Well," said Selden, smiling, "it will all blow over. Tom will come back in good shape, and John Rayner'll be so happy he will forget all about this."

"You know, Mr. Selden," said Billy seriously, "it does seem though that every time anybody tries to get that wild mare, there *is* some kind o' trouble."

"Yet nothing has happened that couldn't happen trying to catch any wild horse or tame one for that matter," said Mr. Selden. "That's why these superstitions get hold of people, because it does seem to be that way. Some good luck has come with the venture, too. Now you have a wonderful saddle pony, and I—I've been very lucky because of it."

He set down the crowbar he was working with, and putting a hand on Billy's shoulder, he pointed to where he had been digging with his other hand.

"That, you see there, is the head. See that place where I began digging, way over there; I think that's the tip of the tail. I've come upon a giant, flesh-eating dinosaur, called a gorgosaurus.

"I was on my way back to work early in the afternoon after replenishing one of the fires I was burning for you. I was in a bit of a hurry, and I thought maybe I could make my way back quicker by turning down into the canyon right from where my fire was. When I peered down here, I saw something that looked like a bone. I slid down and saw the end of this jawbone sticking out.

"And this is some jawbone! It's almost four feet long. See that tooth there toward the inside of the mouth; that thing is nearly six inches long.

"I am sure I'll find the entire skeleton buried in this rock. By the way the bones are lying, this monster must've gotten sick. Maybe he had a tummyache. He probably ate too much dinosaur. Looks to me as if he had come here into a swampy patch to hide in the tall rushes and lie down to rest. Nature covered his aching bones with a few blankets of mud, and here's where

he's been sleeping ever since—some sixty or seventy million years.

"I think he's had enough sleep even for a gorgosaurus. He'll have to get up now. We'll wash and polish his bones and set them up in proper order, and he'll have to interest and amuse large crowds of people who will come to the museum to look him over."

"If he's fifty feet long," said Billy, "how'll you send 'im?"

"Oh, we'll pack him in sections. I'm sure the American Museum of Natural History, in New York, will be glad to get him. There, they'll set him up on his feet."

"Will he stand up?"

"They'll make him stand up. They'll support his bones with great big iron pipes and hold them together with plaster and even concrete."

"Have they got rooms big enough?" asked Billy incredulously.

"They are not only big enough for him, but there'll probably be a dozen other monsters like him in the same room, to keep him company."

"Gee! They must have rooms as big as barns in New York."

"In the American Museum of Natural History, they do."

The paleontologist went on working and Billy stood there, watching him, trying to digest the wild ideas that he had given him.

"What are you going to call the white mare?" asked Selden.

Billy was taken aback. In his own mind he had been calling her Lady Lightning, following Ina's suggestion.

But since the trouble had arisen between Ina and himself, he feared that Ina might feel resentful if he used the name she had chosen. While he hesitated, Selden said, "Why don't you call her Gorga, after my wonderful gorgosaurus?"

Billy could only look at the scientist and grin.

"What's the matter with Gorga?" asked Mr. Selden, looking up with an expression of pretended resentment.

"She's no flesh-eating monster."

"Gorgosaurus, here, doesn't eat flesh any more. He's a wonderful piece of luck to me. I ought to get about four thousand dollars for him. The white mare's a wonderful piece of luck to you. You can't call her Gorgo, because words ending in 'o' are masculine. I think Gorga would be a nice name for her. This gorgosaurus, boy, is going to become famous. Just wait till you see the newspaper articles that will be written about him. He'll be more famous than the ghost mare."

"I don't like that ghost name either," said Billy.

"It's really stupid," said Selden. "They call her ghost mare, because they are afraid of her. They have become superstitious about her. That's all superstition is: fear —fear of the dark, fear of the unknown."

Selden went on with his work, and Billy watched a few minutes.

"I want to thank you for the use of your saddle pony, Mr. Selden."

"How does he ride?"

"Oh, he's fine. He has so much spirit I hate t' ride Perry now."

"He hasn't as much spirit as the white mare will have," said Selden, smiling.

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, no!" repeated Selden. "How do you know?"

"Anybody can see."

"Stick to your guns, boy. She's a wonderful creature. When you get her tamed, will you let me ride her sometimes?"

"You bet!" cried Billy vigorously. "I don't think I'd 'a' been able t' get her if you hadn't let me have Dino."

"I am not in too great a hurry to ride her though," laughed Selden. "I'll wait till she can behave like a lady."

Lady Lightning! thought Billy to himself with a smile. Out loud he said, "It won't be long. I feel she'll be easy to tame; she's very wise. Smart horses learn much quicker."

"Smart boys learn quicker, too," said Selden.

Billy smiled uncertainly.

"I better be goin' along," he said. "Thank you again for the use o' Dino, Mr. Selden."

"You're very welcome," said Selden, and as Billy started off, he added, "Don't worry about Tom; he'll be all right in a few days."

There's something about that man, thought Billy as he made his way down slowly toward Perry, that's different from any other man I ever met. He makes a fellow feel comfortable. It's what he knows. Ina's right. A good education's a great help to a body.

He mounted Perry and took the trail up the slope

of the canyon, and on the prairies above he headed straight for the Sailor shanty. Selden's wisdom and strength had smashed into the superstitious fears that had come upon him with the morning's discovery that Tom had been really hurt. He wanted to go into the shanty by himself and make a cup of coffee to assure himself that Selden had really destroyed his superstition. Yet, when he came down into the hollow and saw that bleak, abandoned shack, he recoiled from the idea.

Near the water, he stopped Perry, but he remained sitting in the saddle. A wind was blowing, and as he looked at the tar-papered wall before him, the wind lifted a torn piece of tarpaper, hanging on the door, and slapped it dismally against the wall.

It was too much for him. Looking around to make sure no living soul had seen him, Billy nudged his pony and went on, up the hollow slope and across the prairie, homeward.

As he went, he recalled the scene when with Ina he had peered out of the shanty door at the wild mare across the pond. He could feel the delightful warmth of Ina close to him, and he could hear her saying, "Lady Lightning."

"I'll get her tamed," he said wistfully to himself, "and when I can ride her off alone, I'll bring her down to the hollow and let her drink in the old pond."

CHAPTER 6

A Threat

As soon as Billy came to where he could see his farm-yard clearly in the distance, he began to hear the white mare calling. When he was only a few feet from the corral, she began running around inside of it like a caged animal in a zoo, looking toward Billy and Perry all the while as she ran.

The trough beside the windmill extended into the corral, so that stock confined in it might drink whenever they were thirsty. Billy rode up to the end of the trough that was outside of the corral and allowed Perry to take a drink, while he remained in the saddle. As Perry lowered his head and began drinking, the white mare ceased running around inside. She backed off into her corner but soon came out of it and slowly approached the other end of the trough.

Billy sat motionless in his saddle and watched her from the side of his eyes. When she actually reached the trough and, lowering her head, took a sip of the water, Billy crowed with delight. At the first sound that came from him, the mare backed away into her corner again, but when he drove off to the barn, she began calling frantically.

When Billy came out of the barn again, he walked

back to the corral. As soon as the white mare saw him coming, she backed off into her corner. Billy stepped up onto the trough, where it broke through the corral wall, and from there climbed to the topmost log of the wall. On this log he seated himself astride, as if he were sitting in a saddle.

The white mare glared at him from her corner with as much curiosity as fear, her bushy white forelock coming between her ears and down over her forehead with a saucy curve, her nostrils distended wide with interest.

"We're goin' t' be friends, Lady Lightning," said Billy softly. He had always felt that while horses cannot understand words they do sense anger or friendliness from the way words are uttered. "You an' I, Lady, we'll gallop around over the prairies. I'll take you to the Bob Sailor pond and over all the hills you love."

Billy's father came out of the house, Nellie the dog with him. Billy jumped down from the wall and told his father all that he had learned about Tom from Pete Striker and George Selden. As he spoke, he caressed Nellie, slapping her vigorously in the ribs, while she leaped up at him, trying again and again to lick his face. Billy watched the white mare through all this. He was sure that she was deciding, in her own mind, that neither the dog nor his father and he could be as bad as she had feared.

"You better go an' tell your mother," said Oscar Thornton. "She's been frettin' over Tom. Don't need to tell her Pete Striker was uppity about it. I'll see Pete one of these days, an' if he goes on like that with me, I'll tell him a thing or two."

Billy smiled gratefully.

"Go have your lunch," said his father, "then harness up the three draft horses and see how much of the little wheat field you can drag."

While Billy ate his lunch, he told his mother what the paleontologist had said.

"What does he know about it?" demanded his mother. "He's no doctor."

"He ought t' know a lot about bones."

"Not very nice o' you, makin' light o' Tom's trouble."

"I'm not makin' light of it, Mother, at all. Mr. Selden had ought to know about it. He's been to college, an' he knows a lot about everything. Anyway, Mom, you talk's if I'm t' blame for Tom's trouble. It was his fault jumpin' in like that, tryin' t' get into my way."

"Oh, I don't know," said Sarah Thornton. "All I know is that I wish you'd let the ghost mare be. I don't like it."

"I wish you'd quit callin' her ghost mare, Mother. There ain't no such thing. She's a beautiful mare. She's the most beautiful piece o' horseflesh ever seen around here, an' you'll be proud o' me, ridin' her all over."

"I'll be glad if there won't be more trouble from her."

"Well, shucks, Mother. You yourself always say, 'If you go lookin' f'r trouble, you're sure t' find it.'"

On his way to the barn to harness the three draft horses, Billy stopped again, a moment, at the corral. He looked at the white mare, and she, backed into her corner, glared at him. There was still that wild look about her head and eyes which made her seem different from other horses. Yet she was so beautiful.

Her muzzle was white, a pinkish whiteness like that of the skin of a woman's face. "Lady Lightning!" he muttered to himself. Her eyes were large and round and fearful, and her pointed ears, bent slightly forward, were lined with velvety fuzz. Her mane was thick and wavy, and her tail was extraordinarily long, curving out at the bottom with grace and strength. Her legs were thin and delicate, and her hoofs were narrow and sharp.

She's just nothin' but a beautiful mare, thought Billy as he went on to the barn, an' all that stuff's plumb crazy. Why was she a ghost mare, because Tom was a little fool? What did he think he was goin' to accomplish with such a crazy stunt?

His three horses harnessed, Billy mounted one of them and rode off to the little wheat field, three quarters of a mile north of the Thornton farmyard. There he hitched the three horses to the harrows and, mounting one of them, proceeded up the plowed field. The harrows tore at the furrows and sent enveloping clouds of dust into the air. Up and down the field he went, wrapped in the clouds of dust, thinking of the white mare, of Tom and Ina, of what people in the district might be saying and thinking, and of his mother's gloomy prediction that evil things might continue to follow the white mare. No matter how strongly his mind revolted against such an illogical idea, the superstition worried him.

The first thing he asked, when he arrived home and went into the house for his evening meal, was whether his mother or father had heard anything more about Tom.

"There hasn't been a soul near the place," said his mother.

"Well?" demanded Oscar Thornton, already seated at the table, "people's busy this time o' year."

"You needn't get so mad about it," retorted his wife.

"But you *are* always tryin' t' make it look worse than things are, Mom," Billy said.

"You sure findin' lots o' fault with me lately."

"No, we ain't findin' fault with you," said her husband. "But if you're goin' t' worry that away about the ghost mare, you'll worry us into a lot o' trouble. It won't be the ghost mare's fault; it'll be the fault o' your worryin'."

Billy was delighted with his father's strength of character and the wisdom of what he said, but he was afraid even to smile for fear of hurting his mother's feelings. His father, whose intelligence and understanding of life he had always respected, had taken his place beside George Selden. Both had made it clear to him that it was the fear engendered by people's superstitions which caused the evil things that happened. He was determined not to be a victim of this sort of ignorant fear.

The three days of harrowing went by. Every time he returned to the farmyard he found that no one had set foot in their yard and no word had come from Tom. He became so worried and preoccupied that he began walking past the corral without stopping to look at the white mare.

Billy was on his way to the garden, next morning, when he heard an automobile coming up the road. He stopped in the center of the yard and watched the

machine approach. He recognized it as the rattletrap in which Mrs. Wilber Steele was in the habit of racing around the prairie, as soon as the roads became dry enough. It came chugging into the yard, and Mollie Steele stepped out of it, carrying a basket on her arm. The white mare, frightened by the noisy car, had begun racing around the corral in terror.

"Good morning, Mrs. Steele," said Billy most cordially, grateful for her coming although he knew her to be an unmerciful gossip.

Mrs. Steele replied absent-mindedly and stopped near Billy. She stared silently a moment at the mare, who had now calmed down; then she said, "So that's the old witch!"

Billy resented the remark, but he controlled his feelings.

"You never saw a more beautiful mare, did you?" he asked.

Mollie took a step or two closer to the corral.

"She is beautiful," she said. "I have to own that."

"If that car o' yours was driven foolishly by somebody an' run off into to the ditch an' somebody got killed, would you be afraid to ride in your car after that?"

"Yes, I would, Billy," laughed the woman.

Billy looked at her helplessly.

"There's been an awful lot o' trouble over that mare," she said, looking into the corral.

"But 'twas Tom's own foolishness," cried Billy. "He tried t' get in my way, an' he ran right into my rope."

"Oh, I know Tom." She waved a hand and started for the house.

"What have you heard about him, Mrs. Steele?"

"He's still in the hospital at Calgary. Doctor said if what they're doin' to his back works out all right he'll be able to walk just as good as you or I. But, o' course, John Rayner's got all them hospital bills t' pay. They come back last night, all but the boy. John says he just had to get at his farm work. But Ina's packin' her things an' is goin' back to Calgary. She'll stay with Tom, as long's he's on his back."

She went into the house, and Billy walked over to the corral. He was greatly disturbed by the thought that Ina was at home. If it hadn't been Tom who had been hurt, of all the people in the district she'd have been the one most interested in the white mare. As he stood there, a foot on one of the lower logs, looking in at Lady Lightning, he made up his mind to go to Rayner's at once and convince him that it had been Tom's own negligence. He thought he might tell John that, although Tom was himself to blame, he was sorry Rayner was put to so much expense and trouble. Then he would offer to do some of the work Tom would have done if he hadn't been hurt.

His father was sharpening a plowshare in the tool shed. When Billy told him what he planned to do, his father stood up and looked at his son with pride.

"That's a good idea, Billy," he said. "You ain't done nothin' wrong, but you feel sorry that they, our neighbors, are havin' trouble. You want to help, just as you'd help if it was somebody else that tried to get the mare an' Tom got hurt."

"If he's agreeable 'bout it," said Billy, "I'll just stay and work all day."

"Well, go an' see. You know John Rayner's bad temper. He's always ready to cut off his nose t' spite his face. Likely's not, he'll be kind o' biggety—tell you he don't want your help. Be patient, an' don't sass back, Billy. Just speak the truth. Stick up for yourself. Let him do all the gettin' mad."

Billy assured his father that he would be patient and courteous, no matter how John behaved, and went off to saddle his pony. As he rode away on the road to Rayners' the thought that he would see Ina and that she would be reasonable helped him overcome his dread of facing Tom's father.

But as he came to within half a mile of the Rayner farmyard, he saw John harrowing his largest wheat field. "That harrowing," he thought with regret, "Tom'd be doing now."

John Rayner was coming down the field toward the road, and the end of the field was only about ten feet or so from the road. Billy stopped and waited for the farmer to approach. The wind was blowing away from the road so that the cloud of dust was back of him, and Billy could see him clearly and knew that Rayner could see him.

When he came to the very end of the field, however, John Rayner ordered the horses right around, obviously intending to ignore Billy. The horses were tired of the dragging, and it appeared to them that, at the end of the field and near the road where there was company, a man should stop. They were not concerned about courtesy, but they were eager for a chance to rest a bit. They stopped.

"Good morning, Mr. Rayner," said Billy shakily. "I

thought I'd come an'—you not havin' Tom's help—tell you I'd be glad to help for 'im."

"I don't want your help," growled Rayner, turning and looking bitterly at the boy.

"What happened to Tom was of no fault o' mine," persisted Billy. "But I'd like to help anyway."

"We'll let the judge decide whether it was your fault or not," said Rayner and, lashing at the horses with his lines, started on.

Billy remained standing where he was. Judge! Was he thinking of taking the matter to court? That was horrible. Billy was desperately afraid of courts. He would go on and talk to Ina; she would understand. She loved Tom, but she knew how hard Tom was to get along with. She would realize how Tom's impatience could be the cause of just such an accident.

But he hadn't gone on but a few feet, when he heard Rayner shouting at him. He turned around and saw with amazement that Rayner had left the harrows and was running toward him, waving his whip.

"Don't you go botherin' the women at the house," he was shouting. "You go on home an' keep off my place."

Billy resented being ordered like that, but he was not certain at the moment what he ought to do. He recalled his father's admonition to be courteous, and so he just turned about and rode homeward.

He was glad to find that his father had gone off to his plowing when he got home, because he wanted time to think over Rayner's threat to take them to court. He rode up to the trough to let Perry drink. Though Perry didn't want to drink, he remained sit-

ting there in the saddle, looking in at the white mare. He was glad his mother was busy in the house. He was very seriously disturbed. Have to go to court! He *was* having trouble on account of the white mare.

Selden would say that was foolish. To fight off the feeling, he rode over to the corral, leaned down in his saddle, opened the gate, and deliberately rode in, closing it from the inside.

The white mare immediately backed into her corner and faced him with curious, frightened eyes. Billy kept Perry where he was at the gate and, resting his hands on the horn of his saddle, began talking to her.

The mare remained in her corner, watching his every move, her ears pricking up, amusingly pointing forward every other minute as if she were trying to catch a word that was not as clear to her as the others.

Suddenly, and most unexpectedly, the mare whinnied, apparently calling to Perry. Perry stretched his neck forward, and Billy loosened the reins as unobtrusively as he could. That was to make it clear to Perry that he could go toward her if he liked. Perry accepted the offer. Billy expected the mare to turn and race away to another corner, but to his surprise, as Perry neared her, his muzzle stretched out, she reached toward him with a soft murmur and their noses touched.

A great joy came into Billy's heart. She was delightful! He would have liked to try to touch her, but he didn't want to frighten her. He turned around and rode back to the gate. As soon as he had turned, the white mare whinnied to Perry. At the gate, Billy dismounted, and he saw that the mare, who had come

trotting after them a few feet, immediately backed into her corner again, but he paid no attention to her.

He removed the saddle from Perry's back and set it up on the topmost log of the corral wall. He wanted her to come to it and sniff it, get acquainted with it, so she wouldn't be afraid of it. Then he took off Perry's bridle, intending to leave him in there with her for a while. To give the mare an object lesson in the relation of horses and man, Billy put his arms around Perry's neck and caressed him, pressing his cheek against Perry's muzzle and stroking his forehead with his hand. Whether the white mare understood that he was being nice to Perry or not, she certainly seemed interested as she looked on.

Suddenly the mare turned and trotted off to the opposite wall. There she raised her head high above the top log and called, her fervent neigh piercing the prairie distances. Turning about, Billy saw someone coming. Soon he recognized George Selden on Dino.

Dino replied to her from the distance, and she kept calling to him, till the farmyard echoed with their noise.

"Hello, Billy," said Mr. Selden, riding up to the corral gate. "I see you're already on friendly terms with the lady."

"Yes, sir," said Billy excitedly. "I almost touched her. She didn't run away, either. I rode up to her on Perry."

The white mare was running around for excitement, her eyes on Dino, repeatedly calling to him.

"She's much more excited about Dino than any-

body," said Billy. "They musta' been great friends. I got a notion to ride into the corral on Dino."

"Go ahead," said Selden, dismounting.

While the paleontologist held the gate, Billy rode his pony into the corral. The white mare was beside herself with excitement. Prancing around in fear as she shattered the air with her calling, she came trotting up to Dino, sniffed noses with him, and ran from one side of him to the other. As she moved around, Billy kept reaching out toward her with his hand. At first she shied away every time she saw his hand reaching out, then she lost herself in the excitement of being with Dino, so that she even tolerated his touching her. Billy stroked her neck several times, then he leaned over as far as he could, and taking hold of the loop of the rope that still hung around her neck, he loosened it and took it off.

When Billy turned with a laugh of triumph, holding up the piece of rope, he saw that his father had come into the yard with his plowing horses and was standing and looking on. Billy waved the rope to him, and Oscar Thornton waved a gloved hand back to his son. Billy was so excited he hardly knew what to do with himself.

"Why don't you stay for lunch, Mr. Selden," he begged, riding up to the corral wall. "Let's leave Dino in here; let 'em have lunch together."

"Don't you think you ought to ask your mother about that?"

"Oh, she'll be glad to have you stay," said Billy. "In this country everybody that's around at mealtime stays to eat."

As he said this, Billy dismounted, and hanging Selden's saddle next to his own, he let Dino join the white mare.

"Dad," he said, coming out of the corral, "I asked Mr. Selden to eat with us, and he said I ought to ask Mother first."

"She'll be glad t' have you, Mr. Selden," said Oscar Thornton. "These busy times we don't see many people; she'll be only too glad to have company at the table."

Billy ran into the house and told his mother.

"Go tell 'im he must stay," she cried, dashing about nervously. "But keep talkin' to 'im outside, so's I can get a clean apron on an' fix the table up a bit better."

Mr. Selden thanked them and said he would stay, and Billy took his father's horses to the barn for him.

When Billy came back to them, his father said, "Let's go in an' have a bite to eat."

"Look how happy she is with her company," said Billy, pointing to the corral.

"I saw you takin' the rope off of her," said his father. "She'll be eatin' out of your hands in a few days."

"Billy has a way with horses," said Mr. Selden.

"He was brought up with 'em."

They all laughed and started for the house. Mrs. Thornton, in her clean white apron, had completely reset her table.

"If I'd known you was comin'," she said after greeting the paleontologist, "I'd 'a' had a much better meal for you."

"Better?" said Selden. "You ought to see the meals I have to eat of my own cooking."

"I never saw a man that was a good cook," she said frankly.

"I never saw one either," agreed Selden graciously. "But I've heard that there are great men cooks."

"Sure there are," said Oscar Thornton. "Shucks, if I was a-mind to, I bet I could cook's good a meal as any woman, any day."

He winked as he said this, but his wife turned on him. "All right you c'n cook the Sunday dinner."

"An' you plow up that Sullivan flax field, then."

"I thought you'd find a way o' gettin' out of it."

"A man can't start in all of a sudden an' cook," said Oscar Thornton as the three men seated themselves at the table. "He's got to have a little practicin'."

"Why don't you practice a little then?" demanded his wife.

"You crazy, woman? I don't need to! I got the best cook in the province. What would I be botherin' practicin' cookin' for?"

Sarah Thornton nodded contemptuously, but she was almost bursting with pride at what he had said. Billy thought his father had a wonderful sense of humor and was proud of the pleased look on Mr. Selden's face.

"Practicing," said George Selden, "doesn't seem to help me any. My meals are worse every time I cook."

"Come an' eat with us whenever you can then," said Sarah Thornton, bringing a huge platter with brown slabs of fried ham.

"You better not say that again; I'm liable to be over here two or three times a week."

"If I didn't mean it, I wouldn't say it," said Sarah

Thornton, and there was no doubting her meaning it.

"I've been living off the farmers here ever since I came," said Selden, "because they're sorry for me."

"You haven't been to our house any," put in Billy.

"I'll be here all summer and maybe way into the winter if I have good luck. You'll be getting pretty tired of me."

"Billy's been tellin' us about that thing you found—an animal fifty feet long," said Oscar Thornton. "I s'pose you'll be diggin' at that till the snow falls."

"Just about. As long as I can dig."

"Cost quite a penny t' get a thing like that out o' the earth an' ship it to the big cities, won't it?"

"Oh, yes, but the museum is willing to pay for it."

"They are, huh?" said Oscar, a look of awe on his face. "You sure don't handle all them big bones yourself, do you?"

"No, that's what I came here to see you about," said Selden. "I'm hoping that I can have my entire gorgosaurus exposed in about two weeks or so. You see, first we uncover the bones from the top, leaving them just as they are lying there. Then we dig down and around the sides, just a few inches under the blocks or sections that we are going to ship together, not far enough under to cause any piece to break off. That's when I'll need help. I'll have to have a load of plaster of Paris brought out from Cassils. Each section of the skeleton, each block of bones, has to be covered with gunny-sacks, soaked in wet plaster. The plaster sets hard and protects the bones. When the top is well protected with plaster, we dig under the whole big block and turn it upside down. Then we clean away the under

part, now on top, and cover that in the same way with plaster of Paris. It takes four or five men to handle these blocks, and I'll need two or three wagons to cart them to the railroad station at Cassils."

"Seems like a lot o' trouble to go to for a lot o' old bones," said Sarah Thornton, taking her seat at the table.

Mr. Selden smiled.

"Yes, it really does," he said, "only those aren't just a lot of old bones. If I picked up a lot of old cattle bones on the prairie, buffalo heads, they'd be worthless. There's nothing that can be done with them. We know what the skeleton of a buffalo is like. There are still many of them around. But these bones I'm digging up are the bones of huge monsters who once ruled this earth but who have been dead and gone for many millions of years. The last one probably died sixty million years ago."

"Who knows there ever was any such animal?" asked Mrs. Thornton, smiling doubtfully.

"When you see those bones at the museum, all set up the way they were in the animal, you'll believe there was such an animal. You come over where I'm digging and take a look at the bones I'm uncovering—"

"Not me," cried Sarah Thornton. "No, sir."

"Well, I hope you don't ship 'em off before I get a look at 'em!" said Oscar Thornton.

"There's no mistaking the fact that it was an animal," said George Selden, still trying to convince Billy's mother. "You see the whole skeleton: the head, the jawbones, the backbone, the ribs—it's not just an idea. You measure it and you find it's over fifty feet

long from the mouth to the tip of the tail. You don't see any animals around today, that big. Except whales, of course. They're even bigger. But they have no legs. These giant lizards have legs, huge legs like ostriches. The jaw of the gorgosaurus I found is four feet long—I mean the jawbone. Some of his teeth are six inches long."

Mr. Selden picked up his knife and showed how much of it was six inches.

"Imagine an animal with teeth like that! You come upon some skeletons of creatures, whose mouths and jaws show they had no such teeth. In that case you know they were not meat eaters but lived on herbs and plants, fruits or grasses, like our cattle. One creature, one kind of dinosaur, has a bill like a duck's and webbed feet. You know that fellow lived in water, and dived down to get seaweeds and plants, as our ducks do. You believe many things like that when you see them."

"Gosh, that's mighty interestin'!" cried Oscar Thornton. "I sure want to see 'em."

"How can a body know they've been dead sixty million years?" asked Billy's mother, still incredulous.

"That's harder to answer, because it involves a lot of study. You can't know that by just looking. You also have to have experience and to think. How does a farmer know how old a horse is by looking at his teeth? You know by experience that certain things take place in a certain number of years. The geologist knows that certain changes in the earth took place so many years ago, certain layers of earth were formed in those years. When he finds things in a certain layer of earth, and he knows that that layer was formed sixty millions or

so years ago, he knows that they were buried there during that time."

Billy's mother shook her head doubtfully, and Mr. Selden smiled.

"It takes a lot of study to understand that," he said.

"A lot more'n I've ever done," said Sarah Thornton. "A lot more'n I'll ever do."

"I'd like to study that, by golly!" cried Billy.

"I guess I'm too old for that," said his father. "But it's mighty interestin'."

"Wait till you see it, Dad," cried Billy enthusiastically.

"I understand that after haying time and before harvest farmers are not so very busy," said Selden, coming down to business. "By then, I should be ready for help. I figure I'll need three farmers with their wagons, and I'm prepared to pay each farmer nine dollars a day, for him, his wagon, and two horses."

"Mighty good pay," said Oscar, shaking his head significantly. "I'd be glad t' hire out to you for that pay."

"Well that's what I came here for. To get you as one of the three."

"Farmers don't get rich off'n their crops," said Oscar, smiling at his wife. "An extra penny or two'll buy the wife a new apron."

"Apron!" cried Sarah. "With them wages won't hurt you none to buy me a new dress."

"May be you need a strong, willin' worker like me, too," said Billy.

"You're hired, Billy," said Selden. "It's a long,

tedious job, clearing the earth away from the top of the bones of each block. All you need to know is to be able to tell bone from dirt. You do have to be careful."

Billy looked up eagerly and questioningly at his father.

"Would you want 'im all the time?" asked Thornton.

"Well, as much as you can spare him," said Selden. "There is a lot of tedious work there. You see the skeleton lies flat, stretched out horizontally in the rock and sandstone. Every bit of that thing throughout its fifty feet of length and some twenty feet in breadth has to be cleared, gone over carefully. The tops of all those many bones, the big ones and the many little ones, have to be uncovered before the real work begins, before I shall be ready for the rest of you."

"I'll have to have Billy's help at hayin' time, and there's lots t' do 'bout the garden, but you can go there today an' tomorrow, Billy. Supposin' he just goes when he can, when I can spare him here."

"That's what I thought," said Selden.

"The days are long now," put in Billy. "I can work till dusk."

"How much are you going to demand a day?" asked Selden, pretending to be concerned.

"I'll be glad to help you till you are ready for the menfolks," said Billy, "for—for nothin'."

"Three dollars a day ought to satisfy you then?"

Billy looked at his father, embarrassed.

"That's too much, Mr. Selden," said Oscar Thornton.

"I wouldn't hire anybody for less than that," said Selden. "That's my wage scale."

"He'll be makin' so much money his head'll swell," said Sarah Thornton, looking smilingly at Billy. "He'll be struttin' around here like a bantam rooster."

The three adults began to laugh, and Billy looked up, startled. He hadn't heard his mother. He had been preoccupied with a swift counting of all he might possibly earn, and how far that might go to satisfying John Rayner's demands in court. He wondered what his father and mother would say if they knew that John had threatened to take him to court. He was eager for the lunch to be over, so that, on his way to the badlands with Mr. Selden, he might tell him what Rayner had said and ask him what he thought the court might do about it. He believed, now that he had this chance, that it would be better for him not to tell his parents about it, and worry them, until he learned what Mr. Selden thought about it.

When at last Mr. Selden and he were riding side by side across the prairie, Billy broke into Mr. Selden's laughter over something he had said that Billy hadn't heard.

"I went t' see John Rayner this morning," he said.

"Oh, you did?"

"John said he was goin' t' take me t' court."

"What would the court do?" asked Selden.

"That's what I'd like t' know."

"I don't think any court would even consider such a case," said Selden, but after a painful pause he added. "If he could prove that you were to blame, he might make your father pay the hospital bill. But how could he prove such a thing? There were no witnesses. It's your word against Tom's."

"I don't like that court business."

"I don't believe he will ever try it."

But Billy was not completely reassured by Selden's believing that Rayner would not try it. All the way to the canyon and up to the time they started working on the gorgosaurus skeleton, Billy kept repeating his question in some form or another, in spite of Selden's many attempts to convince him that Rayner would not try it.

When they actually began working on the fossil bones, Billy forgot about Rayner and his threat in the intense interest he took in Selden's explanations of what the position of each bone indicated. While Selden chiseled away the hard rock and sandstone, Billy would carefully clear away the cuttings.

"See how far back this huge jawbone is hinged," said Selden. "That shows that he was able to open his mouth very wide, like a crocodile. Imagine the mouthful this jaw could bite out of his prey with one bite. This monster's bite would compare with that of a lion or a wolf, as a modern steam shovel compares with that little shovel, there, of mine."

"Nature makes mistakes like all the rest of us. She allowed these monsters to become so efficient, grabbing their prey and eating them up, that soon there wasn't any more prey to eat. For all his powerful jaws this fellow may have become very hungry. Maybe that's how he died. One can imagine him roaming the marshes and the uplands, looking for something big enough to satisfy such a hunger as he must have had without finding anything. Then, one day, I suppose, he just laid himself down and died."

Billy looked at the dirt-covered fossil bones. Something happened to him as he followed the paleontologist's words. He had never thought about things in the same way before. The whole world seemed to change in the light of his new ability to imagine things beyond merely seeing what was before him. It was as fascinating as it was terrible to picture the badlands, or the marshes that were there at the time, when these great monsters were roaming around, looking for food. He had liked Selden from the first moment he had seen him, but now he regarded him almost with awe. He was such a wise man. If only he didn't have this trouble with Rayner hanging over his mind, he thought he would be happier now than he had ever been in his life.

Working together steadily and talking as they worked, they were able to clear away the upper surface of several feet of the huge neck, below the head and jawbones, by early evening. Billy was disappointed when Selden announced that they wouldn't work till dark this day, even though the muscles of his back were aching, because he wasn't used to that sort of work.

"I must go to see Trot Siegert about getting him to bring the load of plaster of Paris out for me in his pickup, from Cassils," said Selden.

When they had saddled their ponies, Billy said, as if he had come to the conclusion after a struggle, "I'll go by the road with you."

Selden laughed.

"You don't enjoy the idea of going through Rayners' yard, do you?"

"The road belongs to everybody," said Billy.

"That's right," said the paleontologist. "He might order you off his land, but the road is public property, even when it runs through his farmyard."

"I don't want to be fightin' with him."

"Nothing to be gained fighting, but you come along with me."

"Anyway," said Billy as an afterthought, "I c'n turn off on the old Sullivan trail before I get to Rayners'."

"Well, if you wish. I might stop and talk with Rayner, hire him and his team. Working with your father on our gorgosaurus may put the idea of suing out of his head."

Billy smiled gratefully. That struck him as a very likely result, and he began to feel very hopeful about it. He began to feel so much better that he became noticeably talkative.

"Gosh," he cried enthusiastically, "aren't these sand-stone buttes pretty in the evening light?"

"I've spent hours walking around and looking at them, by moonlight," said Selden. "What I am looking forward to is seeing them covered with snow."

"Snow and moonlight," added Billy.

"That's right; have you seen them that way?"

"I sure have! Looks like another world down here then, especially when the snow's melted a little in the daytime an' froze into ice b' evening. Moonlight shining on the ice—looks like lights in big buildings."

"It must be a beautiful sight," said Selden.

They came to the bridge and the roadway, and as they started up the incline of the slope, they heard the rattle of an automobile in the distance. Billy recalled Mrs. Steele's saying that Ina was going back to Cal-

gary to be with Tom. Would this be Trot Siegert, taking Ina to town?

"This may be Siegert," said Selden. "He seems to be the only one in the district who runs around in trucks and cars."

"It may be," said Billy slowly, his eyes fixed on the spot where the road broke the rim of the canyon.

"I hope it is," said Selden, looking with him. "Save me an eight-mile trip to his place."

Before they were halfway up the slope, the Siegert car came into view and turned down from the prairie flats. They went off the road, one on each side, and Selden waved to the driver to stop. The car came to a halt, on a ledge, a few feet above them. Selden rode on up toward the driver; Billy followed a bit more slowly, pleased yet badly flustered by the fact that Ina was, as he expected, sitting next to the driver.

"Hello, Ina," said Billy, moistening his lips, as he drew up to the side of the car.

"Hello, Billy," said Ina, her light-brown eyes looking at him with a glint of unmistakable censure in them.

The fact that she could possibly condemn him without giving him the chance to explain himself made him resentful, and his upper lip stiffened.

"How's Tom?" he asked.

"We *hope*," she said with significant emphasis on the word, *hope*, "that he will be all right."

"Gosh, I sure feel bad about it all, Ina."

"He's had several X rays taken. We can't really tell yet how badly he was hurt, but the doctors seem to think he'll be all right."

"You comin' back soon, Ina?"

"I don't know when I'll be back. All depends on how well Tom gets along."

"Gosh, I wish I had a chance t' talk t' you, Ina."

Ina looked away. Desperate as he felt, Billy couldn't think of another thing to say. He heard Selden say good-by to Siegert, apparently having completed his mission, and all he could do was to mutter a similar good-by to Ina.

George Selden said he was so tired, he'd decided to go back home.

"I can see Rayner tomorrow or next day; I'm sure he'll be willing to work with us."

Billy rode off homeward, glad to be alone. He needed to think over his disappointment in Ina's attitude. In this, Selden couldn't help him. All along he had been certain that Ina of all people would understand. The look in her face showed that she was blaming him, he was sure.

CHAPTER 7

Wisdom and Wildness

TRUE to his word, Billy arrived at Mr. Selden's tent just as the first streaks of dawn had begun to clear away the darkness. Mr. Selden, hearing him, stuck his head out of the tent flaps.

"Do you want to work me to death?" he demanded. "Haven't you any pity for me at all? This is an hour before I usually get up, and here you are wanting to start working already. I haven't even cooked my breakfast, much less eaten it."

Billy smiled.

"I'll go on and start workin'," he said. "You come when you like."

"No, sir," cried Selden. "You're too fast a worker. You're liable to shovel so fast, you'll have my gorgosaurus in the river before I get there. I have a good mind to punish you, young fellow, by making you eat the breakfast I cook."

"Gosh! Breakfast! I ate two dozen pancakes and eight sausage patties an'—"

"Good heavens, boy!" cried Selden with pretended alarm. "Sit down and rest a bit, then. You'll have plenty of hard work to do before the day is over. I hope you feel more like working than I do, today. I

don't know what's the matter with me. Must be spring fever coming belatedly. I find it hard to get up before dawn, and by the time I knock off at dusk, those measly sixteen hours of digging seem to tire me out. Something must be wrong."

Billy laughed.

"That's about the way some farmers think," he said.

"A man can become so good a worker," said Selden, frying some bacon on his airtight heater, the smoke shooting up in a cloud toward his smiling, vivacious face, "that he works when he should be playing. Soon he begins to think that he should work when he should be sleeping, and finally he hates to take valuable time to eat. Before he knows what's the matter with him, he starves to death. A fellow should not work for the purpose of dying. The object of working is to live, to live better and to enjoy life."

"That's right," said Billy emphatically.

"Since you agree with me," said Selden, "we won't work this afternoon. Saturday afternoon is a holiday in well-regulated businesses."

"Oh!" said Billy with disappointment.

"You're likely to 'oh' the opposite way before noon," warned Selden. "Today we are going to dig, just dig like plain, old-fashioned ditch diggers. We are going up a few feet above Gorgo and dig a cave into the side of the butte. After we have a good-sized cave above him, we will dig down to him and expose his wretched bones in all their grim horror. You'll be glad to quit at noon."

"I'll spend the afternoon taming the white mare, then."

"Have you touched her again since you took the piece of rope off her neck?"

"I went in last night on Perry," said Billy, pleased by Mr. Selden's interest. "I was in there with her 'bout an hour. At first she shied off every time I touched her, but soon she let me do almost anything. She's goin' t' be easy to tame."

"Why do you think so?"

"Well, because she's different from most wild horses I've ever seen."

"You're prejudiced," teased Selden.

"No. She really is. All wild horses rebel when you go to break 'em, but most of 'em do it foolishly. They kick and jump and hurt themselves. She kicks and jumps too, but she does it carefully. She watches you, too, and she don't do twice what hurt her the first time she did it. You c'n see she tries to understand."

"Now, Billy," said Selden smiling reprovingly, "you aren't going to tell me she's really the ghost mare?"

Billy looked up at the paleontologist seriously and with surprise. He hadn't thought any such thing at all, but instead of denying it, he said thoughtfully, "She sure does act human-like."

"She's just wise," said Selden. "She looks like an owl with those two pointed ears up and that heavy mane and bunch of forelock."

"Well, last night now," began Billy studying Selden cautiously, "when I dismounted, I started walkin' toward her. She backed off into her corner and lifted a front leg, as if she was goin' to strike me. I kind o' raised my hand up, and I said, 'Don't you dare strike

me.' By golly, she put her foot down, an' she looked so funny."

"She learned the English language mighty fast."

"You think I'm makin' that all up," said Billy defensively. "You come home with me this afternoon, and I'll show you."

"I'd like to."

"Let's go right when we're through workin' an' you have dinner with us."

"I'll make a lunch for you here."

"Oh, no," said Billy. "Mother told me to bring you along any time. Anyway you said you can't cook."

"That's the truth, but I cook just the same."

"Mother's meal'll taste better."

"I don't doubt that," laughed Selden.

They worked hard all morning, and as Selden had predicted, Billy was very glad to put his shovel down. Selden insisted on making lunch, saying he was too hungry to take the time to ride all the way to the Thorntons' for it. Billy was secretly happy to be able to stay for lunch, even though he expected it to be a poor one. The idea of being with Mr. Selden, like a pal, thrilled him to the last degree. He helped him do some of the cooking and went for water with great joy, even though the muscles all over his body ached.

"Gosh," declared Billy when he was halfway through with his fried ham and boiled potatoes, "I never ate a better meal in my life."

"That's because you worked hard for it," said Mr. Selden.

"You're a good cook though, too. Honest you are."

"You're a good friend of mine, Billy. I can see that. We'll get along beautifully, you and I. We'll tame the ghost mare, and then we'll ride all over the district and drive all the ghosts out of the country."

While Billy helped Mr. Selden wash up the dishes, they talked earnestly of ghosts and superstitions, and Billy vowed he would never allow himself to worry about trouble following the white mare and things like that. All the way home, riding side by side across the prairie, they continued talking about that, and Billy listened carefully to every precious word the scientist uttered.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when they came in sight of the Thornton farmyard, squatting on the prairie flatness half a mile away. The house and barn looked like two animals, a few yards apart, staring at each other. The tall windmill near the corral was the only thing that looked like a tree in all the endless miles of prairie. The huge straw stack to the side of the barn kept them out of sight, but the moment they passed it, the white mare saw them and set up an excited neighing. Dino replied at once, and in the excitement even Perry joined in the noisy signaling.

"There's one thing I've learned about that mare," said Mr. Selden, as they rode up to the corral gate, "and that is that nothing in the world means so much to her as companionship. No wonder she was the queen of the herd. I believe that mare would die if she were left all alone for a week."

"I know it," said Billy. "That's why I think it will be easier if I have other horses around when I'm training her."

"I think that's a good idea."

"She's used to me coming in now," said Billy, "why don't you ride into the corral with me? She likes Dino so much."

Billy opened the gate of the corral without dismounting, and Mr. Selden rode in. Then Billy rode in after him, and carefully fastened the gate. The white mare was greatly excited; she ran up and down along the farthest wall, eyeing them anxiously as she ran.

"Let's stay right here a while," whispered Billy, "till she gets used to us both."

Soon the mare ceased running and backed away into her corner. At the same time she kept calling to Dino. Dino replied several times; then, when Selden gave him the reins, he started toward her. The white mare showed that she was very nervous, but she took a few steps forward to meet him, and their noses touched.

Billy nudged Perry forward. He wanted to show Selden that the white mare would let him touch her, but she shied away at his approach. He tried several times, then dismounting, he walked off toward the gate. Mr. Selden turned and rode after him to the gate. Immediately, the white mare came running along, evidently afraid that they would go out again and leave her. At the gate, Mr. Selden also dismounted, and they drove the two saddle ponies back to her.

In the center of the corral space, the white mare turned on both ponies and sniffed at their heads, their bridles, down their manes, and all over the saddles.

"She won't be afraid o' saddles," said Billy, "I've had one on the corral wall for hours to let her smell it and get used to it."

"You have two gates here," said George Selden, examining the extra gatelike wall, which swung on hinges like a second gate near the real gate.

"You drive a bronco in here," explained Billy, "and squeeze him against the corral wall, so he can't move, and you can put a saddle on him."

"You haven't put a saddle on the white mare yet, have you?"

"No."

"Let's try it."

"All right!" cried Billy excitedly, looking off to the house and glad to note that his father and mother were not around.

Walking very slowly so as not to frighten the white mare, they approached their ponies again and remounted. Billy then rode to the gatelike short wall, and remaining in his saddle, took hold of the stick that projected upward from the end of it. Holding it ready to swing against the corral wall, he asked Selden to drive the wild mare slowly into the angle.

Selden walked Dino around the corral, driving the mare before him, but doing it so easily that she was not greatly frightened. Over and over again, he would drive her almost into the angle, only to have her dash away frightened to the other end of the corral. But he kept this up patiently, and at last, they had the mare cornered. She had run in facing the corner, and as soon as she realized that the two walls were coming together, she whirled about. By that time it was too late for her to get out. The small space left open was blocked by Mr. Selden on Dino, and quickly manipulating the end pieces, Billy had her helpless. She

couldn't even hurt herself, because she couldn't rear on her hind legs and she couldn't kick.

"She's so frightened," said Billy. "I'm sorry for her."

They tied both Dino and Perry to the end of the trap wall so that they would be right near her; then Billy, who had dismounted, crawled up the wall and, stroking the white mare's head, talked to her softly. Soon the blaze of terror in her dilated eyes died down considerably.

They took their time. Billy tore bunches of grass from beyond the corral wall and tried to get her to eat it, but she wouldn't touch it. After she had been allowed to rest a bit, Billy brought out the strong halter they had prepared for her and gently fastened it upon her head.

The white mare tried desperately for some time to rid herself of the halter, rubbing her head against the logs to rub it off, but she soon concluded that she couldn't get rid of it.

To get her used to having something on her back, Billy got a heavy blanket and, folding it up several times, laid it on her back and tied it around her with a broad cinch. This frightened her more than anything else. Since she was helpless in her efforts to rid herself of it and since it did not hurt her, she soon stopped trying to rub it off.

To give her a feeling of weight, like having someone on her back, Billy then got a fifty-pound sack of oats and fastened that on top of the folded blanket. By that time, the mare was so obviously worried that Billy thought it best to leave her to herself a while, and they walked out of the corral.

When Mr. Selden and Billy entered the corral again some ten minutes later, Billy had a twelve-foot rope with him. He pulled the rope through the iron ring in the white mare's halter, tying a knot in the center of it, so as to leave six feet of rope on each side for holding her.

They left the gate of the corral open wide, and then, mounting their ponies, each got hold of one of the two ends of the rope. As soon as the trap wall was released, they got the white mare into position between them, one saddle pony on each side of her, and went out of the corral.

If the white mare had any ideas of galloping away, she was afraid to do so. She obviously felt queer having the halter on her head and the strange burden clinging to her back. She was wise enough not to try to bolt, as she was uncertain as to what these things clinging to her might do to her. She picked her way between the two ponies as if she were first learning to walk, her sides trembling noticeably. At the same time, it was apparent that the open spaces before her thrilled her. Her dilated eyes peering ahead, she slowly increased her speed until the three horses together were galloping over the prairie.

When, several miles from the Thornton farm, they turned about to go back, the white mare did look as if she were going to put up a fight, but as the two ponies swung around, the ropes pulling her along, she seemed to change her mind, and away they went galloping homeward.

Until they actually got into the corral again, neither Selden nor Billy uttered a sound.

They led the white mare into a corner and tied each end of her rope to the topmost log of the two walls. Then, still in their saddles and flanking her, Billy untied the ropes that held the blanket and the bag of oats to her back, removing them.

The rest was easy. Billy and Mr. Selden both rode out of the corral. Billy climbed the wall from the outside, and untying one end of the rope, he undid the knot and released the mare. She had been pulling at the rope, making it difficult to untie. The moment she felt herself freed, she whirled about and for several minutes galloped around the corral space, filling the air with dust. Then abruptly, as if she suddenly realized that she was making a fuss over nothing, she stopped.

Billy and Mr. Selden were standing outside, near their saddle ponies, watching her. When the dust had settled down so that she could see clearly, the white mare deliberately walked up to the corral wall inside, nearest to where the saddle ponies were.

"That's what I meant," said Billy. "See how wise she is? Yesterday, she wouldn'ta' come up like this. She's gone through the whole business, an' she's decided there's nothin' to be so much afraid about."

"I haven't had as much experience with horses as you have," said Mr. Selden, studying her, "but I have to admit it wasn't half as bad as I thought it would be."

"It isn't because she's weak," insisted Billy. "She's stronger and wilder than Perry here ever was, but he put up a thousand times as much of a fight when we got him and broke 'im. She ran wild longer'n he."

"I guess you're right, Billy. Her wildness is tem-

pered by her wisdom. Just the same, I wouldn't be in too great a hurry to ride her. Her wisdom might also make her tricky."

"She'll try some tricks, sure, but I'm on to horses' tricks. I'm not afraid of her now."

"Yes, but just because people have those foolish ideas about her, I hope you won't be in too great a hurry."

"Oh, I won't, Mr. Selden. I'll take it easy and carefully. Tomorrow, I'll just put a saddle on her. Let her get used to a saddle."

"Come and help me tomorrow," Billy went on, "and you'll see it'll be much easier already."

"I think I will," said Mr. Selden. "Tomorrow is Sunday. I rather want to be with you when you're taking her out again."

Mr. Selden rode away home, and for the rest of the day, Billy went around as in a dream. All night long he struggled with the white mare in his sleep. Despite his confidence in his own ability to handle horses, despite the fact that Lady Lightning had been unusually easy to handle, there hung over him the subtle fear of the superstition surrounding her, and he kept promising himself not to be too hasty to ride her and to be infinitely careful. He knew very well that the reason Selden had cautioned him, the reason he was coming to be with him when he tried to take the mare out again, was due to his desire to avoid any occurrence that would deepen the superstitious fears of the ghost mare. Yet Selden's warning strengthened those superstitions in the back of his mind.

Sunday afternoon, however, taking the mare out was

even easier than it had been the day before. While his father stood nearby, watching with interest, Billy put a bridle on her head, gently slipping the bit into her mouth. Selden helped him saddle her, and tying a rope to each bridle ring, they rode out on the open plains on Perry and Dino, the white mare between the two ponies.

This time she went as if she had been going out like that every day of her life. She broke forward into an eager lope at once, but there was none of the frightened glare in her eyes. Up hills and down into hollows they raced, the white mare now constantly a foot or so in the lead, and although she continued to toss her head rebelliously every other moment, it was clearly only an effort to rid herself of the disagreeable bridle. She didn't seem to be conscious of her saddle.

Away they galloped almost to the very edge of the canyon. Perry first and Dino soon after began to rebel against the continuous galloping. When they came to the Sailor hollow and the pond where Billy had always seen her, she willingly slowed down for the first time. Her head raised high, her ears pricked slightly forward, her nostrils distended and tremulous, she approached the water, breathing fast and noisily.

She plunged eagerly into the pond, and it was necessary for both Selden and Billy to pull back on the ropes, to keep her from dragging them in far enough to wet their feet.

So vibrating with feeling was she that it was almost possible to read her thoughts. She dipped her muzzle into the water, took a hasty sip, and immediately raised her head high. With the water still dripping from her

lips, she let out a call that pierced the vast spaces and echoed back from the distant hills. She called again and again while they watched her, her graceful head turning from side to side. It was plain that she was searching for her scattered herd among the hazy convolutions of the prairie.

When they pulled out of the water and, going around the pond, went up to the prairies above, the white mare broke into her impatient galloping again, seemingly as eager to get back to the corral as she had been to leave it.

They were racing along in a steady half trot, half lope, about a mile and a half from home, when suddenly Billy was taken with the impulse to get into the saddle on the white mare's back. Without a word, he reined Perry close against her and jumped.

"Be careful," shouted Selden helplessly.

They were going so fast that the mare appeared to be unaware of what had happened. One time, a quarter of a mile farther on, she slowed down a bit and wriggled her body a moment, attempting to throw off the weight on her back, but she immediately plunged forward again. In that way they rode into the Thornton farmyard and into the corral.

When Billy leaped from the saddle, she reared and pulled back. But Billy held on to the rope on the bridle and pulling gently on it, brought her head down, till he could touch her muzzle with his forehead. As he held her head down, he talked to her softly and with one hand caressed her forehead.

It was necessary to get her between the trap wall and the logs of the corral wall to get the saddle and the

bridle off her, but when Billy started forward with both ropes, she actually followed like a well-trained horse.

As a treat for her good behavior, Billy allowed Dino to remain in the corral with her and fed both of them lavishly with oats and hay.

“I don’t think it was a wise thing, ridin’ er like that so soon,” said Billy’s father when at last he came out of the corral.

Mr. Selden smiled significantly, clearly indicating that he felt the same way about it.

“Dad,” said Billy, “you’d ‘a’ done the same. I looked over at her, runnin’ gentle-like—seemed foolish to be afraid.”

Oscar Thornton twisted his head doubtfully.

“Anyway, Dad!” cried Billy, finding it hard to contain himself, “*I rode the wild mare!*”

CHAPTER 8

Riding the Wild Mare

MR. SELDEN stayed for dinner, but throughout the meal, Billy sat there quietly, pretending to be listening to the conversation, even trying to laugh when his father and Selden broke into roars of laughter. Over and over again, he would say to himself, as he chewed absent-mindedly at his food, "I rode the wild mare!"

Sometimes, his face falling back into a wistful look, he would add, "Wonder what Ina would say?"

While his father and George Selden talked of crops and dinosaurs, Billy saw himself galloping over the prairies on Lady Lightning, her white form not like a ghost at all but like a beautiful white light.

This time he was not sorry to see Mr. Selden leaving. As soon as Selden on Dino had dropped out of sight beyond a hilltop, he turned back at once to the corral. He wanted to strengthen the friendship that he felt had begun to grow between the white mare and himself, before she had time to forget it. He did not think of her as a wild thing any longer. She was a being like himself, who wanted to be treated kindly, who was afraid of pain, and who could understand when he made himself clear enough to her.

With George Selden gone, Oscar Thornton settled down to his regular Sunday's reading of the *Alberta Farmer*. Sarah Thornton sat down by the open window in the kitchen to read the Bible.

For half an hour, Billy tried patiently to approach the white mare and touch her, talking to her softly all the time, but always as soon he came too near, she stepped off to the side a few paces. Then he went out into the garden and dug up half a dozen little carrots and came back to see what effect the carrots would have upon her.

Billy's knowledge of horses was instinctive. Some of his ideas he would have been hard put to explain. He felt now that he must pretend that he was not afraid of the mare, and that she wasn't afraid of him. He opened the gate slowly and just walked into the corral. Then turning to her, he held up the carrots so that she could see the green tops and talked to her quietly, telling her about them.

The white mare backed off as he approached her. As soon as she began backing, he stopped walking, only to start forward again when her ears went up questioningly. When he stopped moving toward her, he held the carrots out to her as far as his arm could reach. She stretched her neck toward him and sniffed at the carrots, but suddenly raised her head with suspicion and looked at him through one dilated eye.

Billy crept a few inches nearer, repeating, as he did so, "Nothing to be afraid of, Lady." As he repeated this, he kept sniffing at the carrots, and then he rubbed one small one with his hands till it was clean, releasing a bit of carrot fragrance into the air. Finally he put the

end of the carrot into his mouth and began chewing it.

The white mare looked on, unquestionably interested. She reached toward the carrot as far as she dared and tried to smell it. Then, evidently afraid to move toward him, she raised her head and looked away across the prairies, pretending that she didn't really want carrots anyway. Just as abruptly, however, she lowered her head again and reached boldly toward him. Her white lip gathering like a finger at the side, she seized one of the carrots and pulled it out with a deft twist. Billy didn't move an inch. Lady Lightning watched him as she chewed her carrot greedily.

When she had swallowed it, she deliberately took a step toward Billy, swiftly plucking a second one out of his hand. Billy was so thrilled, he could hardly contain himself. He didn't laugh, as he wanted to, afraid he would startle her.

Lady Lightning came back for a third and a fourth. Every time she reached for another carrot, she seemed to mind less, touching his hand with her muzzle. When he had only one carrot left, Billy turned and walked toward the gate, holding his carrot, so that she could see it. To his delight, she came running after him, increasing her speed when he increased his. Near the gate, he let her have it, but he held it close to his face, so that when she reached to get it, her clean, warm muzzle touched his cheek. He tried to pull her head down toward him, but when she had gotten her carrot, she stepped back.

Billy left the corral, crowing with delight. When he walked into the house, she came to the gate and, raising

her head high above the logs, looked after him hungrily.

Next morning at dawn, on his way to work for Selden, Billy went into the garden and picked another bunch of carrots. When he came to the corral wall to offer them to her, the white mare trotted over to him and greedily seized one after another of them, enduring his caresses as she ate, as if that were just a price she had to pay for them.

Billy worked with Mr. Selden all day Monday and Tuesday, but Wednesday morning, his father told him that he would have to stay home and work in the garden that day. He said that he and Billy's mother were going into town with Trot Siegert and his mail stage, and he didn't like to leave the farm without anybody at home.

All morning Billy worked hard in the garden, but after lunch he decided to devote some time to Lady Lightning. As soon as he came into the corral with a bunch of carrots, the white mare came running toward him. Billy gave her one carrot, then looking at her, he said to himself, "It's foolish to be afraid o' that mare."

He walked out again impulsively, went to the barn, got his best saddle and bridle, and came back with them into the corral. The mare kept away from him as he came in dragging the saddle, but as soon as he offered her a carrot again, she came running right to him. He gave her another but kept the rest of the carrots in his pocket.

When he walked off toward the trap wall, the mare followed him like a kitten. Billy gave her another carrot, then tied his rope to her halter as she ate it. He tied

her to the wall and gave her another carrot. While she was eating that, he swung the saddle carefully onto her back. She became alarmed for a moment and pranced around a bit, but when he gave her a carrot, she quieted down at once, and he was able to tighten the cinch. In like manner he managed to get the bridle on her head. He waited till she had finished eating that carrot, then he gently forced the bit into her mouth.

Billy untied her rope and led her to the center of the corral. There he stopped and looked around. The farmyard was deserted. If anything happened, there wouldn't be a soul around to help him. His heart thumped loud in his side, but he could not resist the temptation. He would have to start some time, and he really felt better to be alone, without anybody looking on and worrying.

Carefully, he put his foot into the stirrup. The white mare appeared to become alarmed but quieted down as he talked to her, and finally, Billy lifted himself and swung his other leg over the saddle.

Lady Lightning began to prance around nervously. Billy slapped her neck gently and talked to her. She turned her head around backward and looked at him with so amusing a look on her face that Billy burst out laughing. It was a look of surprise and it plainly said, What in the world are you doing up there?

Feeling quite at ease now, Billy began nudging her with his knees to move forward, telling her to go on, slightly waving his arms, and slapping her with the reins. First she moved off to the corner, and when Billy repeated his efforts to inform her that he wanted her to go on, she trotted completely around the corral.

When she stopped, he urged her in the same way to go on again. Soon he had her galloping around the corral till the place was enveloped in a cloud of dust.

After a while he dismounted and, tying her to the wall, went off to the garden to get more carrots. As he was digging them, Billy was delighted to hear Lady calling to him.

“Selden is right,” said Billy to himself, out loud, “she’ll stand anything but being alone.”

He removed the bridle bit so that she could eat her carrots in comfort, but when she was through, he put the bit back into her mouth. The corral gate stood wide open. It seemed ridiculous to him to be afraid of such a lovable creature.

He led her right to the open gateway, and as she pricked her ears with the excitement of open space, he quickly leaped into the saddle.

A great change seemed to come over Lady Lightning. The skin on her flanks vibrated nervously, her nostrils distended, and she eagerly looked off into space. For a few minutes she picked her way carefully past the farmhouse, as if afraid some rope or stick would interfere with her going, then facing unobstructed prairie, she glided forward into that strange easy movement that had inspired Ina to call her Lady Lightning.

It seemed to Billy that never in his life had he gone through space as fast as he was going now. He kept himself alert for any sort of danger, but he was convinced that she wasn’t running like a horse that was trying to escape. There was no evidence of any of those tricky little gestures a horse makes when he is thinking

of throwing his rider. She merely seemed in a hurry to get there, and it was apparent she had definite ideas on where she was going.

She headed south and just ran for dear life, and Billy had no way of apprising her of the fact that he would like her to turn around. He pulled on one of the reins, but that meant nothing to her, nor did his slapping her on the other side of her neck with the other one. There was nothing to do but remain in the saddle and let her go where she willed.

When she came to the canyon and started down the incline, Billy shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "Well," he said, feeling a bit easier when she picked her way down slowly, "it's to the badlands I want to go, but I didn't know it before."

She hit the canyon about halfway between the Cassils Road and the trail in the west, which led to the Bob Sailor shanty, and she started down a steep declivity that Billy would have hesitated to attempt even on foot. At one place, she leaped forward a few feet, her legs bunched together, stones and dirt breaking free and rolling down the rest of the incline with a cloud of dust.

She brought him down safely to the bottom, and there, to Billy's relief, she went much more slowly, picking her way between the sandstone forms as if she knew just where she was going. She went directly to the river, stepped in, a few paces, and with her teeth clamped on the iron bit drank with a loud, sipping noise.

When she had had her drink she backed out of the river. Then she turned west and with water still drip-

ping from her muzzle, she broke into a gallop. She raced along steadily without any inclination to stop or turn until she came to Mr. Selden's tent. There she shied a little, as if afraid of it, and turned north toward the canyon slope. Soon Billy saw that she knew just where she was going. From behind one of the buttes appeared the head and neck of Dino, and a sharp, piercing whinny broke the badlands stillness.

They came together, the two of them, nosing each other and whinnying excitedly for several minutes; then abruptly the white mare lowered her head and began to graze a few feet away from Dino. She couldn't chew the grass with the bridle bit in her mouth, not having learned as yet to force it back of her teeth with her tongue, as horses do. When the thing hurt her teeth, she spit out the grass and tried some other grass.

Billy attempted to get her away from Dino, but she just would not go. Finally he dismounted and led her away. She protested, turning her head backward and calling to Dino, but she followed him.

Billy knew that Mr. Selden was at work on his gorgosaurus, so he continued along the river shore in his direction. When he came to a point on a line with the butte where the gorgosaurus had been found, Billy decided that it would be nicer for Selden to see him mounted than walking helplessly and leading her. The moment he got back into his saddle, however, the white mare broke into her gallop, and away she went along the river shore no matter what Billy did to swerve her. When she came to the trail that led up the slope and away to the Bob Sailor shanty, she turned on her own account.

"Well," said Billy sitting helplessly in the saddle, "until you learn to rein, I guess I'll have to go where you want to go."

On the prairies above, she continued on the trail to the hollow and the pond. As soon as she saw the water, she turned and raced down to the shore. She had just had a drink at the river, and Billy was surprised when she splashed right in, as if she were going to drink again. She merely nosed the scum of the surface, however, took one sip, and raised her head high. Billy watched her as she gazed, first in one direction, then in another. She looked like a person trying to figure out something puzzling.

She backed out of the pond abruptly and went trotting around to the north side of it, and there up the slope. For several miles she raced northward, regardless of Billy's efforts to swerve her eastward.

He began to feel that he would have to jump from the saddle and by pulling at the reins, turn her to the side in the direction of his home, but when she came to within a mile of the Thornton farmyard, she turned of her own accord and went galloping toward it. Near the house, she slowed down slightly, trotted into the corral, and stopped.

"That deserves a reward," cried Billy. He jumped from the saddle, closed the gate, and went to the garden for carrots.

"Mother'll give me the dickens," he said to her as he fed her one carrot after another. "We're goin' t' be without carrots, this winter."

When she had eaten all he gave her, Billy remounted and, inside the corral, proceeded to teach

Lady Lightning to neck-rein. He would let her go around the enclosure then try to reverse her suddenly by slapping her lightly on the neck and pulling back on the reins at the same time. At first she seemed confused and at times even rebellious, but as soon as she had caught on as to what it was he wanted, she turned at the least touch of the reins.

Billy finally decided that that was enough for one day, and removing the saddle and bridle from her, he gave her a full measure of oats and left her to herself.

It was half past three when he returned to his work in the garden, and until six o'clock he worked steadily. He dug up a whole row along the edge of the garden plot and seeded it to carrots. From time to time, as he worked, he would stand up straight and look off to the corral. Always he would see Lady Lightning standing against the wall nearest to him, looking sleepily in his direction, her tail swishing at the flies.

When he quit working at six o'clock and went into the tool shed to put away his tools, the white mare set the prairie vibrating with her calls, because he had gone out of sight. Billy watched her from inside the shed, crowing with delight. Then he sent Nellie out to keep her company. Nellie took a long time trying to understand what he wanted her to do, but when she did go out, she just walked to the center of the yard and sat down on her haunches. Nellie was afraid of the wild mare, and the wild mare was distrustful of her. Dogs looked too much like the coyotes of the plains to Lady Lightning, to whom, as to all horses of the prairies, coyotes were natural enemies.

When Billy came out of the tool shed, the white

mare immediately came to the corner of the corral nearest to him. When he started for the house, she walked along with him, inside, as far as she could go. Billy walked over to the corral, climbed the logs, and sat down astride the top one. The white mare came toward him, but several feet away she stopped. She knew he had no carrots, and though she wanted him near, disliking to be alone, she was still considerably afraid of him.

Billy went into the house and got some sugar. When he returned with it, she came up to him and took it. As she chewed on the lumps of sugar, Billy stroked her neck and shoulders.

"I never saw such a horse in my life," he muttered. "It's crazy to be afraid o' her."

The saddle and bridle were still hanging on the corral wall. Billy lowered himself into the corral, walked up to the white mare, took hold of the ring in her halter, and led her to where the saddle was hanging.

She shied a bit when he put the saddle on her, but a few words spoken softly at once reassured her. In the same way she pulled back her head when he attempted to put the bridle on her, but after a few caresses her head slowly lowered. She accepted the iron bit in her mouth unwillingly, her tongue working vigorously to push it out, but she opened her jaws and took it.

Billy mounted and to test her new knowledge of reining swerved her northward. This time she didn't shoot forward on a lope the moment she came outside of the corral, but she walked fast and nervously, her head high, her eyes searching the distances with something like anxiety.

On the horizon, in the north, Billy could see the tiny buildings of the Sorey farm, over two miles away. He was so confident now of his swift mastery of the white mare that he wanted to show her off. Dale Sorey was a young farmer who, like Billy, had horses in his blood. Dale, he felt, would forget superstition in the face of a magnificent piece of horseflesh. Let Dale become so interested in Lady Lightning that he would begin talking about her everywhere, and all the farmers would soon overcome their prejudices.

But halfway to the Sorey farmyard Billy thought of something else. Dale Sorey loved horses, but while he was never cruel to them, he was always rather rough, and Dale wore sharp metal spurs. He had always resented it when Dale would ride into the yard and his saddle pony had blood stains on its flanks.

Impulsively Billy turned the white mare about and rode back toward his own yard. When he came within a quarter of a mile, he saw the Siegert automobile leave the yard and go off along the road. Lady Lightning raised her head high in fear, but since it was going off fast, she soon settled back into her steady gait. Both Oscar Thornton and his wife stood in the middle of the yard, their arms loaded with packages, and watched Billy as he smilingly rode into the yard and into the corral. They stood there dumfounded and waited till he had removed the saddle and bridle and dragging these came toward the barn.

His father smiled appreciatively, but his mother said fearfully, "I wish you wouldn't go off on the prairie alone with her."

"She's tamer now, Mother," said Billy, "than Perry

was the whole first year I rode 'im all over the prairie."

"Yes," said his mother, "she'll be tame an' gentle an' all that, an' all of a sudden the devil'll come into her, an' she'll throw you when you aren't expectin' it."

"Why do you say such things?" demanded her husband. "You make 'im afraid an' something *will* happen."

"I'm afraid, that's why," said his wife. "I want 'im to be careful."

"Don't be afraid, Mother," said Billy. "If she did try t' throw me; I know how to jump."

"You're doin' fine, Billy," said Oscar Thornton. "You've done a better job breakin' that mare than I've ever done, an' I consider myself as good a horseman as the other fellow."

The next several days Billy was very busy completing the garden work and helping his father make all preparations for haying, but there wasn't a day he let go by without at least three or four jaunts over the prairies about the farmyard. Sunday afternoon, he rode to the Sailor shanty, and from there went down into the canyon to let Mr. Selden see him riding the wild mare.

George Selden was on his way back to the tent for paper and pencil with which to make notes. He saw Billy coming along the river shore on an easy trot, and stopped and stared at him speechlessly.

"I can't believe that only a few weeks ago this thing was running wild over the plains," he said. "You must have a genius for training wild horses."

"Nothin' wonderful 'bout it," said Billy modestly, remaining in the saddle while Lady Lightning stretched her neck and bobbed her head to shoo off a big fly.

"Just one thing you got t' do with a horse, an' that's find a way of makin' 'im understand. You can't talk to 'em, an' some folks think that because they can't understand words, they should understand anyway. They get impatient, an' scare 'em; then it's harder'n ever to make 'em understand. They don't know what you want 'em t' do."

"That's a pretty wise statement you made there, Billy," said Selden, smiling appreciatively. "It's just as true about human beings as about horses."

George Selden asked Billy to stay and have a bite to eat with him, but Billy could see that he was immersed in the planning of his scientific notes on his gorgosaurus, so he said he had to get home. He turned Lady Lightning back to the trail and homeward.

Haying time began the next day and lasted for two weeks. Billy and his father worked almost steadily from dawn to darkness. He was never able to take more than fifteen minutes at a time in which to exercise the white mare, but he managed to do that several times a day. One evening he rode off on her all the way to the Sailor shanty, after dark. He let Lady Lightning take a drink in her beloved pond and then rode home at a continuous gallop. She was always ready and anxious to go, and Billy could see that she chafed under the inactivity of the long summer days, confined as she was to the corral.

The first Sunday after haying time, Billy started away in the middle of the morning to ask George Selden to come to their house for Sunday dinner. The white mare, as usual because of her inactivity day after day, galloped most of the way to the canyon.

Billy found the paleontologist shaving at the tent, his small mirror hung on the tent wall outside.

"Hello!" he cried, "haven't seen you in a dog's age."

"Well, hayin' is over now," said Billy. "I'm sure glad it is, too. We're just two of us, Dad an' I, an' we had t' do the work of four men."

"Come in," said Selden, waving his safety razor, as if he were inside a house, "make yourself at home."

Billy dismounted and dropped the reins to the ground. At that moment, there was a call from Dino. The mare started away. Selden looked at Billy questioningly. Billy smiled, but he was a bit uncertain.

"She couldn't go very far with the reins dangling before her," he said, and, his voice took on a tone of awe as he added, "Gosh! Look at her; she picks her way with those reins like an old experienced saddle horse."

"I hope you don't have trouble catching her."

"I don't think so," said Billy slowly, keeping his eyes on the mare as she moved off toward Dino.

"Well, sir," said the paleontologist, going back to his shaving, "I have my entire gorgosaurus exposed now. I'll be ready to start with the packing, pretty soon."

"You're not going to start tomorrow?"

"Some of the farmers will still be haying all this week. I'm pretty sure we'll be ready to start a week from Monday, however."

"A week from tomorrow," muttered Billy, betraying his disappointment. "Long time yet."

Selden smiled.

"You'll think it a long time when you're working," he said. "It won't be before that. I know that both

Steele and Rayner will be haying this week. But I'll know for sure tonight. I'm going to Rayners' for dinner. Steele and Siegert will be there, and we'll talk it over."

"All goin' t' be there?" asked Billy. He was disappointed to learn that Selden was not able to go back home with him.

"Yes," said Selden, casting a hasty glance at Billy. "They're having a sort of celebration. Tom came home yesterday."

"Tom all well now?"

"Oh, yes. As well as ever he was."

"Gosh, I'm sure glad t' hear that," said Billy, but he felt uncomfortable, and he added, as he started away, "I better get hold of the mare before I lose her."

He found Lady Lightning grazing peacefully a few feet away from Dino. When she saw him coming, she raised her head. Chewing clumsily, because of the bridle bit, she looked as if she were thinking seriously of running away. She did take a step or two as he got close to her, but she stopped again and let him get hold of her.

"Many tame old horses won't do that," Billy muttered to himself, starting back toward the tent with her.

"No trouble getting her?" asked Selden.

"She stood still an' waited for me."

"That mare is half human."

Billy started to mount.

"I'm sorry you're not coming to Rayners' with me," said Selden, "but if you come back here after I get back, I'll tell you all about it."

"All right," said Billy eagerly. "How long you expect t' be gone?"

"I should be back here by five or six o'clock."

"All right; I'll have my dinner an' be back."

"I'll see you later then," said Selden going into the tent. "I'll give your love to Ina."

Billy flushed to the roots of his hair. He mounted quickly, but he shouted back as he did so, "Sure!"

George Selden's promise to tell him all about the celebration at the Rayners' made up in part for the disappointments he was suffering, both because he was not invited to the party and because Selden was not coming home with him. He reached the farmyard in high spirits, however, and enlarged enthusiastically on Selden's assurance that Tom was as well as ever when he told his parents about it at the Sunday dinner table.

He told his parents also that he was to go back to Selden's and find out from him when they were to start working for him on his gorgosaurus. And long before it was necessary, he saddled Lady Lightning again and rode away to the Sailor shanty.

It was only four o'clock when he came to the pond, and the white mare stepped into the water and took a long, noisy drink. Mr. Selden might not be back from the party even at six, thought Billy, deciding to go into the shanty.

He rode up to it, tied the mare to the hitching post, and opening the door, sat down on the doorsill. He smiled as he recalled the day Ina and Tom had been here with him. He could still hear her awed whisper, when they looked out of the door and saw the wild mare on the other side of the pond, "She doesn't run

like ordinary horses; she goes like a streak of light. And then he heard Ina saying clearly, "Lady Lightning."

The snipes were flitting over the water as usual, sweeping upward and diving downward, filling the lonely air with their noise. Insects buzzed all around him, and Lady Lightning's tail swished repeatedly to drive them off. Otherwise she stood with head slightly lowered, dozing in the heat of the day.

Billy looked off to the dilapidated little barn some fifty feet from the shanty. He wondered whether he ought to take Lady Lightning in there out of the sun, but he disliked the idea of doing so, the barn seemed so gloomy and cavelike.

A little breeze stirred up, and he felt better. As he watched the mare, he saw her raise her head and stare with sudden interest. A little sandpiper had come sailing through the air and alighted on the dry mud of the shore of the pond, a few feet in front of her. She seemed so intensely interested in the sandpiper, Billy watched her. Her ears bent forward to take in their strangely melancholy crying. Sandpipers had always interested him intensely. There is a sadness in their crying tones that is hard to understand. As they cry, they always run swiftly on their thin black legs, as if they are unhappy because they have lost something and are looking for it.

While she was watching the bird, she stood absolutely motionless, not even her tail moving, except where the breeze was blowing a few hairs at the top. It was impossible to know how much thinking she was really doing as she studied the unhappy little bird, but

she looked so human, Billy felt that he wanted to do something for her.

He got up, and removing the bit from her mouth, he led her to a deep-green spot of grass near the water and let her graze. For fifteen minutes he remained with her, moving along as she moved in her grazing; then he tied her up again and returned to the doorsill.

There he sat until the stillness began bothering him. The things that hung near the bed, several coats and two pair of pants looked like living things, silent with sleep. Wherever he looked in the room, he had the feeling that someone there had just gone out of sight. His eyes fell on the snowshoes that hung folded, one over the other. It suddenly occurred to him that he had himself hung them there. It had been a winter Sunday. He had spent the day with Bob Sailor, and Bob had taught him how to walk with snowshoes.

He decided that he didn't want to stay there any more, and closing the door carefully, he mounted Lady Lightning and rode off.

It was only five o'clock when he got down into the canyon, but try as he would to hold the mare back, she could not walk slowly. He was delighted, however, on reaching the tent, to see that Selden had already returned.

"How was the party?" asked Billy after he had dismounted.

"Oh, it was very nice."

"Did you talk to Siegert an' Steele about comin' to work?" asked Billy, though he would have preferred to ask whether he had talked to Ina.

Selden smiled slightly, and Billy became embarrassed.

"Yes, they'll be ready to come to work a week from tomorrow."

"Good," said Billy and dropped with noticeable abruptness into silence.

"Tom is real well?" he asked again.

"Too well," said Selden, breaking into a laugh.

"Too well?"

"John Rayner certainly spoils that son of his. I can understand now why he got hurt, out there with you."

"Why?" asked Billy; he wanted him to spare no details.

"Oh, he's just spoiled. Wants his way all the time. Of course, he has been sick. Was a sort of hero in his home anyway. But a right-minded boy wouldn't want to take advantage of that all the time, especially not among a houseful of guests, come to celebrate his return."

"Ina's certainly not like that," said Billy.

"She's an awfully nice girl. Very much like her mother. Quiet, kindly, intelligent— You can see she is just keeping the peace in the family, in this matter of Tom's having been hurt. She knows that John Rayner would be angry if she blamed Tom, and so she doesn't blame Tom. She knows he's spoiled, though."

"I did give her your love, by the way." Selden grinned.

"Oh, sure," said Billy, flushing.

"Well?" demanded Selden.

"Well," repeated Billy.

"You're a funny fellow," said Selden, pretending to be offended. "Don't you want to know what she said to that?"

"I'm old enough to know when I'm being teased."

"I'm not teasing at all. I'm a friend of yours, so I was glad to be able to put in a good word for you—and I wanted to do something for her too. I like that girl myself."

"I bet you never even talked to her."

"I didn't, hey? You suppose I'd sit right next to a beautiful girl all through a long dinner without even talking to her? Besides, she had such a faraway look on her pretty face, I was sorry for her. I told her she looked as if she had lost her best friend."

"Aw, you did not, really, did you?"

"First you tell me that I am not telling you the truth; then you ask me to tell you some more. That's a great way to treat a good friend."

"I don't know for sure whether you are telling me something, or whether you're just trying t' have some fun with me."

"I have never lied to you, have I?"

"I didn't say you lied, Mr. Selden; I don't think you ever lie."

"I'd like to know what you call it, then. After I have told you that I did something, you say, 'You did not!'"

"I didn't think you really meant it."

"I mean everything I say."

"All right, say it again; this time I'll know that you mean what you say."

"Oh, you like it so much, you want to hear it a second time."

"Aw, don't say anything any more," said Billy with despair.

"Now you are telling me to keep still."

"I better go," said Billy, turning toward Lady Lightning.

"Come on," laughed Selden. "Now which of the sweet words I uttered would you like to hear again?"

"I'd like to know the truth, whether you said what you say you did to Ina."

"Of course I did. I told you; I always tell the truth."

"Did you say it just that way?"

"Oh, I might have had a slightly different accent, but I did try to make her understand that you often go to the Sailor shanty in the hope that she might, by accident, be taking a ride out that way. I made it clear that it would be a great pleasure to you if she did."

"Did you honestly?" asked Billy.

"Do you want me to believe that if Ina came along while you were there you'd be exasperated because she came along?"

"I wouldn't tell 'er that, anyway."

"Why not? You pretend to have such a great love for the truth."

"Oh, shucks! I give up."

"If Ina should happen along while you are at the shanty, dreaming of her, and you find yourself getting violently angry, because she is there, you can jump into the pond and cool off a bit."

"Is Tom going to work with his father?" asked Billy to change the subject.

"You mean for me, next week?"

"Yes."

"No, he is not."

"Does he know you asked me to?"

"That wasn't any of his business, so I didn't tell him."

"He'll be mad because I'm to work for you, an' he's not."

"I wouldn't hire him, even if he hadn't gotten hurt."

Mr. Selden had been changing clothes while he talked, so he could go back to his gorgosaurus and do a little more work there. When he started off, Billy walked with him, leading the mare behind him.

"I've hired Wilber Steele and his team and wagon, John Rayner and his team and wagon," said Selden, still in his teasing mood, "Oscar Thornton and his team and wagon and his son."

"You really want his son, too, then?"

"I told you I always tell the truth."

"A kind o' George Washington?"

"Oh, no!" cried Selden with a serious expression on his face. "A George Selden."

"Well it will be a great pleasure t' work for a man like that."

"It will be work, too."

"I like hard work."

"Well, there'll be plenty of it."

They came to the butte beyond which was the hollow where the gorgosaurus was found and stopped.

"I thought you was all through diggin' on the gorgosaurus till the top's been covered with plaster."

"I am," said Selden. "I'm going there now to study him. I have to write a paper on the monster, tell what

I can of his habits from the position of his bones. I have to give my idea of why he had such tiny front legs and what he used them for, and why his hind legs were so big and strong."

"I don't see how you can do it," said Billy.

"Well, you would understand after you had seen a dozen or so of these skeletons," said Selden. "You see how the bones of different types of animals of this sort differ, and that gives you ideas of why they are different. It's a deep study. I'm going to spend this entire week working on my paper."

Billy twisted his head significantly.

"If you'd like to come to our house for dinner next Sunday," he said, "my mother said to tell you to come."

"Thank you, Billy, and thank your mother. I'll see how I get along with my paper. I may have to work all day Sunday. If I think I can make it, I'll drop over perhaps, Saturday evening, and tell your mother I'll be there."

Billy said good night to him and rode on homeward. At the Sailor shanty he lingered several minutes, thinking of what Selden had told him about Ina. Then as the shadows began to seem noticeably long, he started for home, going as slowly as he could get the white mare to go.

CHAPTER 9

Lady Lightning Christened

BETWEEN haying time and harvest time, the Thronton farm work slowed down considerably. During the week before Billy and his father were to go to work for George Selden, they devoted themselves mainly to the large garden, which supplied them with vegetables for the entire year. They worked in the garden all morning, and sometimes in the late afternoon, but during the heat of the day they kept out of the sun.

After the midday meal, while his father tinkered around in the tool shed, overhauling machinery to be used in harvesting, Billy would saddle the white mare and ride off to the Sailor shanty. If the sun was very hot, as it was most of that week, he would put the white mare into a stall in the dilapidated little barn and sit for hours on the doorsill of the shanty and gaze away over the pond, up the barren slopes of the deserted hollow.

Every time a curlew flew into sight or a hawk appeared high in the air, scattering the snipes from over the pond, Billy would look up startled, feeling somebody was coming. He would then search the rim of the hollow for half an hour before he was willing to

give up the illusion that he had really heard or felt someone coming.

One time he was startled by something moving on the hilltop beyond the water. It was a badger whose tiny form, cut against the sky, seemed bigger than it really was. It was noticeable only for a moment, as it had loomed up and then turned down the incline and was lost. But Billy jumped up from the doorsill, certain, for that one moment, that it was Ina coming down into the hollow on foot.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday came and went. By Friday afternoon Billy went to the hollow hopelessly. He was convinced now that Ina had no intentions of coming, that Selden had merely teased him about her. He decided that, even if Selden had really told her what he said he had, she would be reluctant about making the trip, if only because Selden had thus implied that he was aware of Ina's interest in him.

Then she came. He had started to go home. He had shut the shanty door, gone into the barn, and led the white mare out into the yard. He was still in the cave-like opening of the little barn when he heard the patter of hoofs, and the mare pulled back in alarm, her head raised high.

Ina came trotting into the yard on the little bay pony Tom had always ridden. She let her pony trot all the way into the yard, and a few feet from Billy, she sprang gracefully to the ground. Having imagined her coming so many times and been mistaken, Billy couldn't believe his eyes.

It was one of the most beautiful of summer days. The warm prairie atmosphere hummed with a soft breeze,

and the strong fragrance of wild rose blossoms broke through the dank background smell of the pond.

"Hello, Billy," said Ina. "I was afraid I was going to be too late. I was afraid you wouldn't be here."

"Gee!" said Billy feelingly. "If you'd 'a' come five minutes later, I'd 'a' been gone."

"There she is!" muttered Ina, her brown eyes focused upon the white mare.

The white mare turned her pointed ears as if to catch what Ina was saying, then she took a step toward Ina's saddle pony and, reaching forward with her muzzle, touched his nose. Ina laughed with delight.

"Isn't she adorable?" whispered Ina.

"I sure think so," said Billy.

He thought that Ina also was adorable, but he didn't have the courage to say so. He looked at her helplessly. She seemed so different somehow. She had on a pair of soft, light-green slacks and a fluffy cream-colored sweater. A narrow red ribbon held down the luxuriant, golden curls of the permanent she had acquired in Calgary. But while the extraordinary beauty of her citified appearance took his breath away, Billy was not unaware of the fact that it indicated that Ina no longer belonged to his world, the world of the prairie where she and he had grown up together.

"How did you ever tame her so soon, Billy?"

Even her voice seemed changed. It was more mature, sweeter if anything, but the change worried him.

"Oh, she just took to everything. Just treated her kindly."

"Would you let me take a ride on her?"

She asked this so ingratiatingly he couldn't possibly

refuse her. But he was vaguely afraid. Without saying anything, he handed her the reins and took her pony from her. When she mounted and galloped off, he stood there openmouthed. He watched her race away with the feeling that he must be ready at any moment to mount her pony and go after her.

The white mare glided up the incline to the top of the hill, then she turned and galloped completely around the rim of the hollow. At the shanty again, she swept by Billy who merely turned to follow her helplessly with his eyes.

“She’s wonderful!” Ina shouted as she tore past Billy.

Again she made the skyline at the top of the hill and again raced around the hollow. Billy had begun to fear that Ina was not able to control her. But she came tearing down the incline toward the shanty and came to an abrupt stop a few feet away. Ina leaped gracefully to the ground, her hair fluttering, her face aglow with excitement.

“She’s glorious, Billy!” she said with so much feeling that it sounded as much like a cry as a laugh, and as she said this, she pulled the white mare’s head down to her and pressed her excited cheek against her soft, pinkish muzzle. “She glides along so smoothly, you don’t go bobbing up and down as you do on most ponies.”

“That’s a fact!” cried Billy gleefully.

“You gallop around the hollow on her, Billy; I want to see her going.”

Billy mounted Lady Lightning and trotted up to the top of the hill. There, keeping in sight, he drove her as

fast as she could go. He raced completely around the hollow and came tearing down to the slope again. As he dashed to the ground near her, Ina cried out again, "She moves like light."

Billy smiled happily. He was breathing too fast and too hard to reply. Ina took the reins from him, and again pulling the white mare's head down to her, she whispered to Billy, her eyes glowing pleadingly, "Call her Lady Lightning, Billy, will you?"

"That's just what I am calling her."

Ina's eyes opened wide, and a new sheen came into them.

"You remembered that?"

"Sure," said Billy. "That's what you called her. We were in the doorway, here, lookin' out at her. She was there across the pond."

Ina looked down to the ground, as if she found it hard to talk.

"That was only a month ago," she muttered finally.

"Mr. Selden wanted me to call her Gorga in honor of his gorgosaurus."

"He told me. I thought that's what you were calling her."

"No, I liked your name better."

"I'm awfully glad. I'm highly honored, Billy."

"No more'n right," said Billy hesitatingly. "She belongs to you really. I kind o' wanted, all the time, to share her with you, Ina. I had no idea of just grabbin' her off for myself. If it wasn't the way—the way your father feels about it, I'd be happy to let you take her, keep 'er a while, ride 'er all over the prairie. I'd be

kind o' afraid now though. If anything happened, they'd say—”

“I couldn't take her, Billy, anyway. I'm going away tomorrow.”

“Going away tomorrow?” Billy's forehead wrinkled painfully.

“Yes, I'm going back to Calgary. I'm going to work there and go to school.”

Billy could only look at her.

“While I was staying near the hospital to be with Tom, I told the lady of the house that I was going to go to school next fall. She runs a large rooming house. She's a very nice woman. She said she'd hire me to help her. She's going to arrange my work so that I can go to school at the same time. And she wants me to start right away.”

“Rooming house,” said Billy. “You'll have t' work awful hard, Ina.”

“It's the only way I can get to go to school now, Billy. Dad's got t' pay over a thousand dollars in doctor and hospital bills.”

“Gosh!” cried Billy. “Weren't for that accident, you wouldn't have t' work like that.”

“Well,” said Ina. “No use feeling bad about that now. That's all over. Tom was just as much to blame as you.”

Billy's eyes narrowed, and his face flushed.

“Ina, do you really think I was to blame—”

“Billy, let's not go into that. I'm going away and—”

“That's just why we must go into that, right now. I'm not going to let you go off like that, Ina, without at least telling you my side of it.”

"I really must go, Billy; Mother'll wonder what happened to me."

"But you can't go like that. I may never have the chance t' tell you my side of it, an' I must tell you."

He took the reins out of her hands, tying both ponies to the hitching post. Ina was standing there helplessly, looking as if she wished she could go, but Billy was determined to get his story over to her. He took hold of her arm and led her to the doorsill of the shanty.

"Sit down, Ina," he begged. "I'll never bother you with this again, but I know Tom's told you everything from his side. That's natural, but you got t' hear my side of it too."

Ina hesitated, but she did sit down. As he sat down beside her, however, the feeling that she was going away and that he would not have her companionship like this any more lay like a stone on his heart.

"You was always crazy about the wild mare, more'n Tom. I was crazy about her, too, but—mainly—because you was so interested in her, Ina. Tom—you know that, Ina—Tom didn't care so much about her. He was all for the Mounty's shootin' her, now wasn't he?"

"I know," said Ina, "but that night, after the Mounty had told you and me what he did, I argued Tom into seeing it our way. That's one reason why I felt so bad about your going off by yourself, the way you did."

"But don't you see, Ina, that I couldn'ta' known that? I went off t' get Mr. Selden's pony. You came

when I was gone. When I got home, it was too late to go back t' your place."

Ina smiled, obviously out of a sense of toleration.

"Why didn't you accept Tom's partnership then, when he came the next morning?"

"That's just what I tried to do," cried Billy forcefully. "But he wouldn't let me. Did he tell you that I tried, chasin' after him several miles, to say hello to him and to tell him?"

"No, he didn't."

"All right. How could I tell him when he refused to speak to me."

"That's Tom's trouble," said Ina, looking down at her boots. "He does get mad, that I know."

"I tried my best to be friends with him, but he was too mad to know it. He called me a sneak, said I wanted t' sneak off an' get the mare for myself, an' when I said it wasn't so, he got mad because he said I was callin' him a liar."

Ina sighed.

"I've tried so hard to get him over that," she said. "He's like Dad. He gets mad, then he can't defend himself any more."

"First of all, Ina," Billy went on, "I was out chasin' the mare at four o'clock in the morning. He come along at ten."

"He said you'd just been out half an hour before him."

"There you are!" cried Billy. "How did he know when I came out? I was out racin' over the prairie at four. He come along at ten. Then when I had wore the

mare out, he runs in t' try t' get her away from me. It just happens, Ina, that because of you, not because of Tom himself, I can tell you, but because of you, Ina, I was even then willing to get together with 'im. I tried to tell 'im that it was best to wait a while yet till the mare was even more tired, but he began tryin' to lasso her, and what was I to do? When I told 'im to wait, he said I was trying to get ahead of him. He told me no matter what, he wouldn't let me get her. I was tired and mad too by that time, an' I said he couldn't stop me. He said he'd show me.

"Well, when he threw his loop an' missed, I thought 'twas only fair he should let me try next. I threw the loop an' hit right square on her neck. He tried to get in my way but was just a bit too late. He ran into my rope an' was knocked off."

"He told me that you were constantly driving him off."

"Gee! Ina, that's not true. Maybe now he got himself to think so—I don't say he's lyin'—but I know it's not true. People get mad, they see things from their sides only. You know, Ina, Tom gets mad much quicker than I do."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Ina. "It's too bad it happened that way. If we had come upon the Mounty, all together—"

"Even that didn't happen, because Tom got mad. You know that, Ina."

"Yes, that's true. Well, it's all over, Billy, and it can't be undone."

"But at least you know my side of it. Nobody in the

world can know just what happened that moment, Ina, but Tom an' I. Tom's told you his story; I wanted you to hear mine."

"I don't believe just everything Tom tells me, Billy. Does that make you feel better?"

"If you wasn't goin' away, Ina, I'd be very happy."

"I'm not going away forever."

Billy sighed. Ina looked at him sympathetically, then she put her hand down on his and immediately jumped up.

"Now I must go," she said.

"I'll ride along a ways with you."

"Billy, I'm afraid I better say good-by to you here," she said, extending her hand. "If Dad found out I was here, he'd—he'd get mad." She laughed. "I don't want him to think that I am going against him. He'll get over it in time."

"Gosh, Ina," said Billy. "We went through ten years of school together. I hate t' think of your goin' away."

"I'll be back. I'll come home every holiday."

"Oh, yes—but—"

"Don't feel so bad, Billy—"

She took his hand again, pressed it between both of hers, then she turned with tears in her eyes, mounted quickly, and rode away.

Billy returned heavily to the doorsill. He lowered himself with a thud. His eyes upon her could barely see her. She went straight south, as if she were going to the badlands, and as long as she was in sight, she kept turning around and waving to him.

When she had turned over the hilltop and vanished

in the southern sky, he got up and, mounting Lady Lightning, rode home. All the loveliness seemed to have gone out of the prairie, as his weary eyes turned from side to side and saw nothing.

CHAPTER 10

Rayner Immovable

EARLY Monday morning, immediately after breakfast Oscar Thornton hitched his best team of draft horses to his best wheat-hauling wagon and rumbled away toward the canyon. While he took the Cassils Road, Billy, on horseback, struck out across the open plains in the direction of the Sailor shanty. Billy told his father that he didn't care to ride through the Rayner farmyard on Lady Lightning, but an even stronger reason for his going off across the prairies by himself was the desire to pass through the Sailor hollow, which Ina's coming had turned into a shrine.

By the time he reached the rim of the hollow, the big red sun was peeking over the eastern horizon. Never had the prairie appeared more beautiful to him. The grass everywhere sparkled with heavy dew. Up and down the slopes, which were pink with masses of clean-washed wild rose blossoms, the gophers were busy getting their breakfasts and gathering grass for their long winter sleep. Over the pond, insects were already humming with the labors of the day, and snipes flitting through the air were already feeding on them.

Since parting with Ina Friday afternoon, Billy had

been painfully restless and discontented at home. The excitement of working for George Selden and the adventure of packing the gorgosaurus off to the railroad station gave him his first great relief.

On her way down toward the shanty, Lady Lightning fell back into a steady walk. Billy's eyes were on the spot where Ina and he had said good-by. He was on the verge of urging Lady Lightning to go faster, thinking it time for him to get to George Selden's, when the white mare turned around, walked right up to the shanty door, and stopped.

Billy laughed, delighted with her. He leaned forward in the saddle and stroked her velvet neck a moment. He remembered reading of a milk-wagon horse in some city that had gone around the milk route so often that it knew just where to stop.

This cute little trick, Billy decided, deserved a reward. He dismounted and went inside the shanty. He got the gingersnap tin and scraped together the few small broken pieces left there. While Lady Lightning stood with her head in the doorway, looking around the room with an almost human curiosity, Billy fed her the pieces of cooky.

Then he reshut the door, mounted, and rode off toward the canyon. When he came to where the trail turned down the cluttered slope, Billy stopped. He was fascinated by the eerie grandeur of the badland formations in the soft gray light of early morning.

The sun had not yet risen high enough to reach the deeper places of the valley, and the river winding along in the center of the shaded canyon bottom was still silvery as if in moonlight. Clouds and wisps of

mist hung here and there over the pointed buttes or moved slowly above the river like giant airships. The different groups of formations looked like clusters of houses, of towns, or cities, half hidden by mists and shadows.

Lady Lightning had her head raised high, and Billy could feel the intensity with which she looked down into those weird depths. He imagined her, still wild, racing down there between the buttes, a white figure gliding along like a streak of light.

"No wonder they called her the ghost mare," he muttered, starting down.

When he came to the butte that stood like a wall guarding the gorgosaurus quarry, Billy saw George Selden already at work on the slope. He nudged Lady Lightning into a gallop to the grass patch where Dino was staked out. There he tethered the white mare near him and ran back to Selden.

The paleontologist was standing beside a pile of sacks filled with plaster of Paris. Billy was about to seize one of them when Selden stopped him.

"They're too heavy for that slope," he cautioned. "Let's carry one between us."

Billy took hold of one end of one of them, Mr. Selden the other.

"I hear Ina's gone to Calgary," said Selden as they started up the incline.

"Yes," said Billy. "She came to the Sailor shanty yesterday."

"I knew she would. Ina's a great girl."

Billy wanted to talk about Ina; it made him feel better.

"Ina, Tom, an' I've gone through the whole school together—almost from my first day of school. Except for the first couple o' years or so, us three've been in the same class year after year."

"How did Tom happen to be able to catch up with Ina?"

"Oh, he never really caught up to her at all," said Billy. "Right now Ina knows a hundred times as much as Tom'll ever know. For a few years Ina an' I were alone in the class; then John, he couldn't stand the idea that Tommy was in a lower class than me. He got the teacher t' put 'im ahead, an' Ina had t' work with him at home, every night of her life, t' teach 'im what he couldn't learn by himself in school. In a school like ours, on the prairie, grades don't matter so much. I think that's one reason why Ina's always been so anxious to go away to school. I bet she'll be glad t' do her own work this next winter without havin' t' worry about Tom's studies."

They came to the top of the incline.

"From here," said Selden, "I just roll 'em or slide them down."

He gave the bag a twist and a shove and sent it sliding down toward the ledge where the gorgosaurus skeleton now lay exposed in the side of the butte, as on the bottom of a cave.

"Prairie schools are not as good as city schools," said Selden when they started down for another bag. "You ought to go to Calgary yourself, this winter."

"Dad needs me on the farm," said Billy. "He can't afford to hire help, an' the farm's too big for one man."

They were silent till they got down below and took hold of the next sack of plaster.

"John Rayner'd have a fit," said Billy as they started up, "if I went to Calgary. He'd make Ina come home."

"You think he really would?"

"He's as stubborn as an ox."

"He's a blamed fool."

As Selden spoke, he turned and looked back. They heard a wagon rumbling along the canyon bottom. Billy saw John Rayner drive around a butte and come to a stop at the pile of sacks.

"Here's John now."

"Say good morning to him, Billy," advised Selden in a lowered voice. "Pretend there's nothing between you."

They shoved the sack of plaster down into the hollow and turned for another one. By the time Selden got down below, Rayner was hoisting a bag up onto his shoulder. Nervous over his expected meeting with Rayner, Billy had lagged behind a bit.

"Good morning, John," said the paleontologist. "Billy and I find a hundred-pound sack too heavy to carry up that slope."

"I don't mind it," said Rayner.

"Good morning, John," said Billy.

Rayner did not even look his way. When Billy joined the paleontologist, Rayner was halfway up the slope. Billy said, "He wouldn't even be civil."

"That's all right," said Selden. "I'm glad you acted civil anyway. He is probably ashamed of himself. You acted like a man; you've done your part. I wouldn't lick his boots."

"He'll wait a long time," said Billy, "before I good-morning him again."

Selden laughed, and they went on up with another sack.

Oscar Thornton arrived a few minutes later, and Wilber Steele in his wagon, behind him. The horses were unhitched and tied to the wagons. When Oscar Thornton and Wilber Steele each took a sack of plaster on his shoulder, George Selden said to Billy, "They're stronger than we are; let them finish carrying the plaster up. Now you and I can go to work on the head block."

Billy had no more than greeted his father when John Rayner came down the slope.

"Morning, John," said Oscar, but John did not reply to him either.

"Where is that there ani-mule?" asked Wilber Steele when he and Oscar reached the top of the slope. He was a big man, bigger by several inches than either John Rayner or Oscar Thornton. He had a mass of curly black hair and a twinkle in his blue eyes.

"There he is," said Selden, pointing to the cave. "Have a care as you go by him. One bite of a jaw like his would cover you and that sack of plaster with you."

"By gosh," cried Wilber, stopping and pretending to be scared, "I don't know's I want t' go near 'im or not."

Oscar Thornton laughed out loud. Even John Rayner smiled. But when they had all followed the paleontologist down the other slope to the very mouth of the cave he had dug, they were so awed by the enor-

mous skeleton that no one said a word for several minutes.

"Does give a fellow the shivers," said Steele finally. "Looks like a grave, by gosh."

"Look's if he laid down there," said Oscar Thornton, "an' just never waked up again. Can't you jus' see the way he laid him down?"

"Look at the way those ribs curve up," said Selden. "I believe he died of a stomachache. His stomach swelled; his ribs spread out."

"Look at them tiny fore legs!" cried Steele. "Gosh, his hind legs is twenty times as big."

"You see," said Selden, "he walked like a great bird on his hind legs. They had to be big and strong enough to hold that enormous body. His fore legs weren't very important to him. He probably used them only to hold his prey as he took a bite."

"Wow!" cried Steele. "You make me cold, talkin' about a bite of them jaws. You know, I always had a shivery feelin' when I came down these badlands. Now I know why."

"An' he's been dead sixty million years," commented Oscar.

"Thank God!" cried Steele. "Sure glad he left no children runnin' around here."

"These aren't actually the bones as they were when he was alive, are they?" asked John Rayner.

"No, they are not actually," said the paleontologist. "They're the bones as they were, but petrified. You see, as the body becomes sealed in mud and sand and rock, the flesh disintegrates. The bones resist dis-

integration. As they lie sealed up through the years and the centuries, water seeps through the rock and sand and earth, and the minerals it carries go into the cells of the bones, replacing the bone cells."

"What we're seein' here, then," said Oscar Thornton, "is not bone, but that mineral?"

"That's right. But the bone matter was replaced so slowly and so perfectly that what you see is a perfect copy of bone matter as it was."

"How do you know that this feller wasn't a little lizard," asked Steele laughing, "that was swelled that way into this big feller?"

"Because we have found fossil remains of little fellows as well as big fellows. We find such remains of everything, even plants and seeds. If a pine cone can be found petrified, exactly the size that pine cones are, why would you assume that some things were petrified much larger, while others by the same process were not swelled, as you say?"

"That knocks your argument out, Wilber," cried Oscar triumphantly.

"I guess maybe it does," said Wilber.

Billy was proud of his father.

Selden then explained how he intended to proceed with the day's work, and each man picked up some one of the tools lying around.

"What I want to do," he said, pointing to the head bones, "is to break off the block of earth containing the head and pack that separately. I'm not sure yet just how many sections I'm going to make out of the whole skeleton. That'll depend on how we get along. It is extremely important that whatever we do, we do

with the greatest care. I don't want any bone broken, cracked, or chipped, and I don't want any bone separated from its section. Each bone must be kept in its proper order and position in the skeleton."

Mr. Selden set Wilber Steele to work digging under the end of the head block, and Oscar and John along the side of it.

"Billy," said Selden, "as soon as these men have dug a foot or so under the block, we will need some sticks to support the overhanging end of it. Will you take this hatchet and go to that draw over there and get me some sticks? I saw a lot of wild cherry trees in there. Cut about six of them, and don't take any limb thinner than your wrist. Cut them as long as you can."

Billy took the hatchet and went on his way. When he got to the draw, he saw Tom Rayner coming along the river on his pony. By the time he had his sticks and came back to the hollow, Tom was standing near Selden, looking down at the three diggers.

"Hello, Tom," said Billy, but Tom did not answer.

Selden turned around and winked at Billy.

"By gosh, Mr. Selden," said Tom, still looking down at the men who were digging under the block, "don't you need another man?"

"You might get down there," said Selden, again winking at Billy, "and push that block free with your shoulder."

"Why don't they do that?" asked Tom smiling.

"They're not strong enough."

Wilber Steele let out a roar of laughter. Tom grew sober.

"No, Tom," said Selden, "you better wait yet a while.

Maybe next summer I might find another monster."

According to Selden's directions, the men dug down under the block at a slant. It was necessary to dig and to chisel very slowly, so that nothing would happen to the bones, and when they had gone down and in, as far as they dared, Selden put them to digging under the shoulder and neck, while Billy and he set his sticks under the head block to make sure nothing would break off.

"If you'll bring your lunches down to my tent," said Selden at noon, "I'll be glad to make some coffee for you."

The three farmers went down to feed and water their teams, taking their horses off to the river. Billy started away toward Lady Lightning, intending to get on the white mare and ride her toward his father's wagon, where he might give her some oats and hay. But on the way he changed his mind. There was bitterness enough between the Rayners and the Thorntons, he figured, as it was.

He led the mare and Dino to the river for a drink, deliberately walking off farther east than was necessary, so as to avoid being seen with the white mare. When the two horses had had their fill at the river, Billy led them back in among the sandstone formations. Going almost to the canyon slope, he took them to his father's wagon, where he gave them some oats, and then led them back to where they had been staked out.

By the time he got to Mr. Selden's tent, everybody was sitting on the ground near it, and Selden was pouring coffee, which he had made in a large pail, going

from one to the other as he did so. It was evident that Selden was trying to enliven the group by saying amusing things, but while Wilber Steele shattered the silence with his loud bursts of laughter, John Rayner and Tom sat apart by themselves and had little to say.

All afternoon Billy could see that Selden deliberately set John Rayner to work with Oscar Thornton, to try to break the resentment between them, but to no avail. John replied when he had to, but that was all. Soon after lunch Tom mounted his pony and rode home, and he did not come back again.

After lunch the plaster packing of the head block was begun. While Selden cut up a bundle of burlap sacks into large squares, the men brought water from the river, in pails, and filled the tub in which the plaster was to be mixed. As the men poured the plaster from the sacks into the water, Selden stirred it with his hoe. As soon as the plaster was of the right consistency, each man dipped a piece of burlap into it, and carrying it dripping to the head block, laid it over the bones, pressing the wet burlap into the indentations. Several layers of plaster-soaked burlap were laid out over the top of the entire block, and then the plaster that was left in the tub was spread over these.

By three o'clock the plastering of the top of the head block was completed. Since it was necessary for the plaster on the top to be thoroughly set before the block could be turned upside down and plastered in the same way on the underside, Selden said it was time for them to quit for the day, and everyone went home.

As the Thorntons were having their evening meal, Oscar told his wife all that had happened in the day's

work, while Billy sat, preoccupied, thinking of Ina, wishing now that he had made more of an effort to induce Tom to be friendly. Suddenly Billy was startled by a loud laugh from his father.

"John," he said taking a healthy bite of meat, "went around all day with a long face. The more he pouted, the more I made 'im talk."

"He's savin' up t' make you cry," said Billy's mother. "Mollie Steele was over again this afternoon, an' she says John's tellin' everybody how he's a-goin' t' take you t' court an' make you pay that thousand-dollar hospital bill."

"Let 'im try it," cried Oscar, sobering up. "No law on earth'll give 'im one penny. There weren't no one there but Tom an' Billy. How can he prove it was Billy's fault? The law can't say one boy's tellin' the truth, an' the other's lyin'. Go t' law, shucks! Some folks think the law's out t' give them revenge. The law ain't nothin' if it ain't for justice. How they goin' t' know what's right, when there weren't no one there t' see?"

"We ain't never had t' go t' court about anything, Oscar Thornton," said his wife. "I don't like it."

"I don't like it neither," said Oscar as if he were going to add a conditional phrase, but overcome by the weight of what he was thinking, he dropped into silence.

Billy realized how bad his father was really feeling. He knew how passionately Oscar Thornton had always avoided anything that involved any sort of litigation. His father had never talked of lawyers except as people one should keep away from.

"Oh, John'll get over it," said Oscar abruptly, his

face brightening again. "John's a good man. He hates givin' in, more'n a hen hates water. You know how jealous he is about everything. I knew I'd get 'im t' talk if I bragged about havin' somethin' better'n his. I says, 'John, how many sows of yours've littered?' He says, growlin' like a bear, 'I don't know.' I says, 'Four o' mine's littered—two dozen hogs apiece.' He got so excited, he forgot he was mad. 'Two dozen apiece!' he cries. 'Well, I jus' can't say exactly,' I says, 'but it sure looked that way t' me the other mornin'.' "

"What'd you want t' lie to 'im for?" demanded Sarah Thornton.

"I wasn't lyin'," said Oscar, smiling doubtfully. "I got a right to tell 'im what it looked like t' me. Anyway, I made 'im talk."

"You can't exactly blame 'em for feelin' bad," said his wife. "How'd you feel if it was Billy got hurt, an' you had t' mortgage your farm t' pay the hospital bills?"

"I'd be proud I had a place t' mortgage, and I'd be glad I c'd save the boy's leg."

His eyes flashed as he said this. Billy looked up at him with an affectionate smile.

"Well, o' course," admitted his wife, "but—"

"There ain't no but about it. He spoiled the kid in the first place, struttin' 'im about all the time, tryin' t' make 'im out better'n he is, better'n anybody else's kid. He knew Tom from the first could never get the ghost mare, an' all he tried t' do was have Tom rope in on Billy's gettin' 'er. That's what he's been doin' with 'im in school, isn't it, shovin' 'im along t' be as smart as Billy'n the girl when he ain't. That kid got

what he deserved, even if I wasn't exactly glad he got hurt."

"There ain't no use o' your naggin' John, though," said his wife. "You're all the more likely t' keep 'im mad that way."

"I ain't naggin' 'im," said Oscar. "Can't he talk like a man an' be civil even if he is mad? It don't cost nothin' t' be civil."

CHAPTER 11

A Summons

THE giant skeleton was divided into six blocks or sections, each of which had to be wrapped in plaster of Paris and carted away in wagons to the railroad station at Cassils. The five men worked all week long to accomplish the great task. By Saturday afternoon the entire skeleton was safely bedded in straw on the floor of a freight car. That night it started rolling on its way to The American Museum of Natural History to interest, inform, and entertain millions of human beings. After countless centuries of sleep, sealed in the underground rock of a butte in the badlands of the Red Deer River, Gorgosaurus was obliged to get back up on his feet, along the wall of a great museum, to tell what he could of the ages in which he had lived and fought and stuffed himself on his prey.

All week long either Oscar Thornton or Billy worked with John Rayner, but if Selden hoped, by throwing them together, to wear down Rayner's resentment, he failed utterly. In one particular he even made matters worse. After that first day Tom did not appear again at the river, and Billy was certain that Rayner had forbidden him to come, that Rayner

further resented Billy's working there while Tom had been incapacitated.

Talking it over for the tenth time, at the supper table Saturday night, Oscar Thornton said, "He has shown me now, an' no mistake about it, that he don't want to be friends—I lick no man's boots."

"He means t' save himself that hospital bill, too, don't forget," said his wife. "That's why he don't break down an' speak. It'd be kind o' funny f'r 'im t' speak to you an' then haul you off t' court."

"Court," repeated Oscar contemptuously. "The judge'll laugh at 'im."

"We're simple folks," said Sarah. "We don't know the ways of courts. Mollie says a lawyer told John he c'n take your farm away from you."

Billy looked up, horrified. He gazed anxiously at his father. He saw his father's face grow swiftly serious. He was eating slowly and obviously without appetite. When his wife asked him whether he would have another piece of pie, he said no absent-mindedly and shoved his plate away.

The harvest season came, and the farmers worked again from dawn to dark. Some days they worked way into the night. When Trot Siegert came with his combine to thresh the Thornton crop, John Rayner, who like other neighbors had always been of Siegert's crew, did not come along this year. When the threshing crew ate at the Thornton table, John Rayner's name was rarely mentioned. If someone did speak of John, the neighbors looked at each other significantly as if they felt it a courtesy to mention Rayner's name in the Thornton home.

When the threshing crew rested after the midday mealtime, as they always did, some of the younger farmers asked Billy to ride the white mare, but the older men looked on smiling doubtfully, as if to imply that they were having nothing to do with the ghost mare.

After harvest, came the most exciting time in the year to Billy, when he and his father drove load after load of grain to the elevators at Cassils. His father would drive one team and wagon, leading the way, and he, driving another, would keep within fifty feet or so behind him.

Sitting on the wagon load, rolling along slowly at the rate of about four miles an hour, Billy had ample time to think of all that had happened that summer, all that had happened in his life. The year before this Ina had gone to town with him when he had taken in his last load of the season. How happy they had been that lovely autumn day! For eight hours they had crept along the roadway as it wound across the flat prairies, yet when Billy spied the towering grain elevators of Cassils, he had been filled with regret that the unforgettable trip was coming to an end. All that day they had talked of school and life as if they were to go on forever, beloved classmates in the same little schoolhouse. One year, and that dream was shattered.

Billy came to a high hilltop some ten miles south of the Red Deer River valley, and recalling that Ina had asked him to stop there, he brought his team to a halt. His father was crawling down the slope ahead. From where he sat in the wagon seat, one could see several roadways converging, cutting across a valley

like the branches of a stream. Ina had wanted to count the number of wagons that could be seen from that point, crawling along those roadways like ants, carrying wheat to town.

Ina had always been so loyal to the country and station of her birth. She wanted to point out to him the importance of being a farmer, the greatness of carting wheat to the elevators. Farmers were more important, she had argued, than businessmen in the towns. People's lives depended on the food that farmers raised.

As he looked now, not a single wagon was visible. More farmers took their grain into town in automobile trucks, leaving at dawn and spending the day in town. He knew that, but as he absent-mindedly put on the wagon brakes and started down the incline after his father, his heart was heavy with the feeling that the prairie had been deserted.

It was still daylight when the grain elevators loomed up on the prairie horizon, but the shadows of the horses, to the side of the road, had lengthened. Billy was glad to reach town, glad that his long lonely trip was over. He hoped that the harness store would still be open after his father and he had dumped their loads of grain. He had received his check from George Selden for all the work he had done, and he wanted to buy himself a brand-new saddle and bridle, fancy enough to be appropriate for a saddle pony like Lady Lightning.

When he entered the little town, the smell of suppers cooking was in the air. Children were playing noisily in different places. Dogs were barking, and radios were blaring. Automobiles were trying to pass

him all the time, blowing their horns raucously and impatiently, and Billy, made a bit nervous by the racket, told himself he didn't like towns. But when the wheat had been weighed in the wagon box and dumped into bins from where it was carried off by conveyor belts to the upper part of the elevators, and he drove to the livery stable and left the horses in stalls, he felt very different.

He liked the noise and motion and excitement of town. He was thrilled by the everlasting ringing of locomotive bells, as they shunted the freight cars on the tracks at the edge of town. He liked the gaiety and laughter of the young folks walking up and down the sidewalks, and above all, he was fascinated by the different displays in the store windows.

By the time he got downtown, however, only the drugstore and the restaurant were still open. The harness store had only one saddle in the window, and that was one he did not like very much. So he returned to the livery stable.

He found his father washing himself in the room upstairs that they were to occupy for the night. Oscar Thornton was a personal friend of Beryl Greeley, the owner of the livery stable, and whenever Billy and his father came to town, Beryl let them sleep in one of the several rooms above the huge stable, in front. The other rooms were occupied by the different stablemen.

After Billy had washed, they went down to the town restaurant for their evening meal, but they were back immediately after, because they were tired and would have to get up early the next morning.

Billy had always enjoyed sleeping in that room above the stable. The autumn nights were cool, and he liked to hear the steam radiators sizzling and enjoyed the cozy warmth that came from them. He liked to lie in bed for hours and listen to the various trains coming and going, and there was a strange fascination to him in the footfalls of people passing by in the night. Sometimes he would hear voices of people talking softly on the sidewalk below his window, and all through the night he would wake up and hear these town noises. Through the general hum of town life, he would hear the rhythmic stamping of horses' hoofs on the wooden floors of their stalls below.

After his early breakfast the next morning, while Oscar Thornton went to buy half their winter supply of groceries, Billy raced away to the harness store. He had to wait three quarters of an hour for the store-keeper to come and open his store, but when at last he entered the place, the pleasure he got looking at the saddles and bridles made up for the agonies of his long wait.

Billy weighed and measured and considered all the specifications, the size, color, and quality, of every saddle, bridle, and strap in the store, their fixtures, accessories, and ornaments. He went from one to the other of these, where they hung on the walls or sat on their pedestals, returning to the first as soon as he had reached the last, and going down the line all over again. So fascinated was he in making his comparisons that he had lost all sense of time.

"For heaven's sakes!" cried his father, coming to get him, "haven't you picked out your saddle yet? I've

bought a hundred dollars' worth of groceries and things, an' I've made five trips from the stores to the wagons at the livery stable, an' here you are still lookin'."

The storekeeper laughed, and Billy, smiling, said, "Look, Dad, which of these two bridles'll look nicer on Lady Lightning?"

"That red-banded one with the gold tassels looks nicest to me."

"I think I'll buy this blue one," said Billy, as if he were just thinking out loud.

Oscar Thornton clamped his big hands onto his hips.

"I'll be switched," he cried. "You asked me—"

"Well, Dad, look!" cried Billy, laughing apologetically. "She's white, ain't she? Her name's Lady Lightning—shucks there's more blue in lightning than red."

"Why'd you ask me, then, if you know so much?"

"Well, be honest now," said Billy. "Ain't blue more like it?"

Oscar Thornton cocked his eye.

"Well, since you asked me t' be honest, I believe you're right."

The storekeeper howled with laughter.

Billy put the saddle on his shoulder. He wouldn't even let his father carry the bridle. As he walked along the street, he was so proud, his cheeks were red. He was certain that every boy or girl that passed him envied him. They all stopped and stared. He wished he might say to them, "But you ought t' see these on Lady Lightning—that'd be something t' stare at."

They had neared the livery stable. Billy was thinking sadly of how long it might be before he could show off this saddle and bridle on Lady Lightning to Ina, when a big man stepped out of the livery-stable doorway and came to meet them; he had evidently been waiting for them.

"Hello, Oscar," said the man hesitantly, "that your son, Billy?"

"Yes," said Oscar slowly and nervously.

"I'm sorry it's my duty as sheriff to hand these to you," said the sheriff, handing a paper to each of them.

Billy could barely take his, holding both saddle and bridle, but he managed to get hold of it with the hand in which he carried the bridle. The sheriff walked off again, and following his father to the wagons behind the big barn, Billy threw his saddle and bridle into the wagon box and began to read his paper.

It was a printed paper, and as he held it folded up, he read what had been typewritten above a series of printed lines:

JOHN RAYNER AND HIS SON,
THOMAS RAYNER,

vs.

OSCAR THORNTON AND HIS SON,
BILLY THORNTON.

When he opened the paper and began reading the inside, he saw that it was a summons to court. He had half expected it, and if it had merely summoned them to court at a certain day, it would not have frightened him so much. It stated that, through Billy's negligence

and deliberate wrong-doing, Tom had been hurt and put to great expense. Not being used to legal formalities, Billy felt that he had already been condemned by the court.

"He ain't got no right t' talk there as if it's already proved," cried Oscar Thornton, his face almost livid with resentment. "What is the law anyway, if a man don't have t' prove what he claims?"

"He just says that, Dad," cried Billy, unhappy with the thought that he had brought all this on his poor father. "O' course, he'll have t' prove it. He's just sayin' here why he's askin' us t' go t' court."

"That's all," said Oscar with a grim smile. "He's got t' give a reason, else the judge wouldn't ask us t' come all the way down here."

"We better get ourselves a lawyer, Dad. Don't you think?"

"I'm not mixin' up with no lawyers," cried Oscar, his eyes flashing belligerently. "When does it say we got t' go t' court?"

"Wednesday, October 12."

"All right, Wednesday, October 12, we'll go there like honest men. No lawyers. We'll tell the judge exactly what happened. You explain. Don't be afraid t' talk. Show the judge how you was in your rights, how you got permission from the Mounty, how you was a-chasin' the mare from four o'clock on, how he came at ten, an' tell—be sure now t' tell how he said you'd never get the mare—don't forget that. No judge in the world'll allow him damages in such a case."

He seemed to feel better; he had brought himself out of his dejection by his own arguments. His face

had brightened, and when at last he climbed into his wagon seat, both teams hitched, he turned back to Billy and said with a smile, "Not only that, but I'll make John pay us damages for makin' us drag off t' court."

Billy felt better himself, because his father was optimistic, but he suspected that his father was not quite as optimistic as he pretended to be. What bothered Billy as he climbed into his own wagon seat was that all the way home his father and he would be thinking the whole trouble over, all the time, without being able to say a word to each other.

And it did seem to be the longest, the most painful trip he had ever taken from Cassils to his home. They got home just in time for supper, at dusk, the days now being much shorter.

While his father carried box after box of groceries into the house, Billy unhitched the horses, watered them, and took them each to their stalls where he fed them hay absent-mindedly. So busy was he thinking of Rayner and how he would have to speak up to the judge, that he actually started for the house without having taken his saddle and bridle into the barn, to hang on the board he had so happily nailed up at the end of Lady Lightning's stall. He remembered it only as he passed the wagon he had driven.

He went to the wagon box, got his precious treasures, and after hanging the saddle up, he put the bridle on to Lady Lightning's head. The white mare was excited, but Billy knew that her excitement was due to the fact that she was hoping he was going to take her out. Lady Lightning was most happy when she was rac-

ing across the prairie she loved and least happy when she was confined to her stall.

"Gee, Lady, you look beautiful in that bridle," muttered Billy, stepping back a pace or two and straining a little because it was not very light there, "Gosh!"

The dainty little forehead strap, half covered by Lady's forelock, the golden tassels hanging at each side, the shiny brass rings only brought out more clearly the shapely beauty of the white mare's graceful, queenly head. But the thought that the court might possibly make his father pay all or part of Tom's hospital bill took all the pleasure out of him. He now felt it had been selfish of him to spend the money he had earned on a saddle and bridle when his father might need it so badly to pay the Rayners.

He hung the bridle up beside the saddle, and too unhappy to reply to Lady Lightning, who called to him when he started out of the barn, he went on to the house.

As he entered the vestibule, he heard his father say, "If he was the fair-minded man I always thought John t' be, he'da' only asked f'r half the expenses, layin' the blame on his own boy too, as I'd 'a' done."

Billy broke into the kitchen.

"But I was not the least bit t' blame, Dad," he cried. "I didn't do one single thing that caused Tom's trouble."

"I believe it," said Thornton, seating himself at the supper table. "Such things ain't easy t' prove. I was just a-sayin' that if I was him, I'd try harder t' be fair than he's tryin'."

Billy washed and went to the table. For a long

time, they ate in silence. Then his mother spoke up, abruptly, "How can you pay a thousand dollars t' anybody?"

"No court'll ever make me do it," insisted Thornton, his eyes flashing.

"Courts can make you do what they want," said his wife almost as belligerently. "If the judge thinks John's right, he'll jus' tell you t' sell your farm."

"Oh, Mother," cried Billy, "you always see the worst of it."

Billy finished his supper hastily, then he got up and said, "I'm goin' right over t' see Mr. Selden. I'll show 'im that paper an' ask him what he thinks we ought t' do."

"May be a good thing," said Oscar Thornton.

It was dark when Billy led Lady Lightning out of the barn, but even in the darkness, her new saddle and bridle shone in the starlight as though iridescent.

A cold, penetrating wind had arisen, and as Billy galloped across the prairie, the earth seemed to take on the whiteness of frost. Winter was now not very far off. Billy thought, as he raced along, how he had always looked forward to the winters with their dances at the schoolhouse and their dinner parties in the different neighbors' homes. It seemed to him that a ghostly curse indeed had fallen upon his world. Ina would be gone this winter, and even if other people did invite them to some of the district dinners and parties, the Rayners would not. The Rayners were in the habit of serving more neighborly dinners than all the rest of the farmers put together.

So completely preoccupied was Billy with these

gloomy thoughts that he made no effort whatever to steer the white mare, letting her go entirely at her will. Even when he reached the Sailor hollow and saw the dismal shanty stand black against the silvery whiteness of the pond, he didn't realize how completely he was leaving matters to Lady Lightning. Suddenly at the side of the shanty, she turned and, trotting up to the door, came to a stop.

Billy ordered her on impatiently, and all the way to the canyon he tried in vain to rid himself of the ugly superstitious fear that Lady Lightning was determined to bring him there for some dark, mysterious purpose.

"But why does she always come up there like that?" he asked himself, and at once he answered himself, almost angrily, "O' course she'd come up to that door, like that, me takin' her up there all the time. She's just wise. I always come here, so she think's that's what I'm doin' now."

He found George Selden in his tent, making notes by lamplight, his little airtight heater sending out waves of delightful warmth. He seemed very glad to see Billy; and, asking him to be seated, he proceeded to tell him with great enthusiasm of the several heads and other parts of different kinds of dinosaurs he had found.

Billy tried to listen intelligently, but his mind was too weighted with his worries. At the first opportunity, he told Selden of the summons and showed it to him.

George Selden read the document over twice, then he said, "I think Rayner's making a mistake. I am confident that no judge would give him a judgment

in this case. There are no witnesses. No one but Tom and you were present when Tom fell from his horse. The judge would have to decide which one of you was telling the truth, and which one was not. Judges don't do that."

"Why did he allow them to send out these papers, then?"

"Oh, that's just routine. That doesn't mean a thing, Billy. Don't worry about that. Any man can sue any other man, whether he has a case or not. You can summon me into court if you like, tomorrow. All you do is go to the court, make out some complaint, and the court has to demand that you appear. But when you get to court, you have to present evidence, proof, or the judge will throw the thing out. That happens, by the way, quite often."

Billy almost laughed out with the joy of his relief.

"I'm going to see Rayner about it, Friday morning," said Selden. "You come over Friday afternoon, and I'll tell you what he has to say. I'm going to tell him frankly that I think he'll lose the case if he does take it to court."

"But he's got t' take it to court now, don't he?"

"No. If I can change his mind, he can tell the judge the case was settled out of court."

Billy thanked him gratefully and hurried home to tell his mother and father the good news. But when he came back, Friday afternoon, the paleontologist shook his head significantly.

"He's as bullheaded as he can be about it," he said. "Some lawyer got him to feel that he will surely win."

Billy lowered his head.

"Dad's about sick over it. He's afraid they'll take our farm away from us."

"Tell him to hold on to himself, Billy," said Selden. Lowering his voice somewhat, he added, "Tell you what I did: I know that Ina is not in sympathy with her father over this. In fact, I know that he hasn't told her he is suing you. If she knew, she'd come back here and raise the dickens with him. I wrote her a letter and told her all about it. Without in any way going against her father, she can come here and testify. If it does get to court and you get a lawyer, your lawyer can subpoena her as a witness. On the stand, all your lawyer would have to do is get her to admit the truth of the story you told me—Tom's getting angry at you, the last day of school, and recklessly plunging into the icy pool. That would prove him to be hotheaded and reckless."

Billy smiled.

"Anyway," Selden went on, "the Rayners have asked me to come to dinner Sunday. In a nice, subtle way, I'm going to get John to feel that you have a good case, that you can get witnesses to prove Tom gets angry quickly and that he is impulsive. I'm going to make him realize that he hasn't a leg to stand on. He has no case at all."

CHAPTER 12

Reciprocation

ALL day Saturday, Billy worked with his father, banking the house around the foundations. It was a dismal day, clouds constantly sweeping down from the north across the sky and hiding the sun, and the cold, penetrating wind almost tore things out of their hands as they worked. First they set boards up on end, a foot away from the foundation, making a tiny wall about two feet high; then they filled the space with straw and finally covered the straw with boards. When the winter blasts tore at the house, this banking prevented them from breaking through into the cellar, freezing the vegetables stored there, and making the whole house cold. Everybody predicted a very bad winter.

As he worked all day, Billy's mind seethed with conflicting thoughts. He kept picturing himself in court, telling his story to the judge. One time he would see himself victoriously convincing the judge that Tom was himself to blame for his accident; another time he would imagine the judge scowling him down, giving him no chance to tell his story. One moment he welcomed the chance to go to court and defend himself; the next his heart would beat with terror at the idea

of having to do so. So, too, he would think Selden's plan of sending for Ina a master stroke one time; the next he was on the verge of racing off to the canyon to plead with Selden not to ask Ina to come and testify against her brother.

While he was sure that his father and mother, like himself, were unable to think of anything but this impending trial, he did not speak of it to them any more, and they, apparently feeling the same way, said little more to him about it. Little was said about anything in the Thornton farmhouse those gloomy days. Everybody went around silently doing his duties, seething within himself.

Billy could hardly sleep at all, Saturday night. He lay there wishing that the night would end. He wanted Sunday to come, so that he could ride off to the Sailor shanty to help while away the time and at evening go to Selden's and find out what the paleontologist had been able to accomplish with Rayner.

Toward morning, Billy finally fell asleep. He was awakened at daylight by the howling of the northern blasts which shook the house and wailed dismally against the outside corners of the garret. He looked out of his window, certain that he would see the prairie white with snow, but he saw only rolling thistles, hurrying off into space as if fleeing from danger. Angry gray clouds were churning in the skies, and he could almost see the snow that was about to start falling.

By ten o'clock in the morning the wind had subsided somewhat, and the snowflakes began falling lightly, stippling the grayness of the atmosphere.

Billy walked the floor of the warm kitchen, impa-

tiently looking out of the windows every few minutes. If it should snow hard, he feared the Rayners would ask Selden to stay overnight, and he would be unable to see him until the following day.

By noon the ground was completely covered with several inches of snow, and by three o'clock, when he had planned to go to the Sailor shanty, there was almost a foot of snow over everything. And whatever hope Billy entertained that the snow might stop toward evening was soon blasted. The snow increased steadily, and the howling of the wind grew more and more dismal.

The days were very short now, and bad as snowstorms were in broad daylight, traveling through them at night was dangerous. But if Billy had been certain that Mr. Selden had returned to his tent, he wouldn't have hesitated to make the trip.

Because he hadn't slept well the night before, Billy fell asleep as soon as he went to bed Sunday night. Monday morning the skies were clear. The wind was blowing the loose snow into drifts, polishing and hardening the rest of it into a glazed surface.

Winter had come to the prairie with a determination that indicated it had come to stay. Going into town to court Wednesday would be doubly disagreeable. This early arrival of winter also meant that the paleontologist could no longer carry on his work in the badlands. He would have to leave the canyon, Billy realized, as his tent was uninhabitable in winter.

Immediately after breakfast, Billy saddled Lady Lightning and rode off across the white prairies. The mare seemed delighted with the snow. She sniffed at

it and took bites of it, and when she went, she tripped over it in a peculiarly light manner, managing somehow to avoid sinking as deep as other horses did. She kept lowering her head as she raced along and snatching bites of it, as if she hungered for the taste of it. Years of running wild through the winters had taught her how best to cope with snow and to like it.

At the Sailor shanty, Billy stopped. He was afraid that Selden might not have returned yet, and waiting for him in the open in those cold north blasts was not very promising. But he was impatient to hear what Selden had been able to accomplish with Rayner, so he went on.

Sure enough, when he got to the tent, he found that Selden had not yet come back. The wind pouring down into the canyon was not very pleasant, and Lady Lightning kept starting off impatiently, time after time, preferring to be on the move.

Billy decided to go on along the river and watch for Mr. Selden, hoping to meet him on his way home. He was afraid he would have to go most of the way to Rayners', but when he came within sight of the canyon slope, he was surprised to see Selden on foot, leading his saddle pony, who was limping painfully, behind him.

Billy raced toward him, and a few feet from him quickly dismounted.

"I had a little accident," said the paleontologist. "Coming down the slope, Dino slipped. I managed to jump into a snowdrift, but I don't know what Dino did to his right front leg. I don't think it is broken anywhere, but he has certainly sprained his knee badly."

Billy looked sharply at Dino's knee. It was swelling rapidly and already looked like a fungus growth on a tree trunk.

"I can't ride him into town, and I can't stay here and wait till he gets better. He may be useless for a month or more. There isn't any sense to my staying here now anyway. Even if this snow should disappear, by the time I can get to my specimens the ground will be either too soft or frozen too hard. If I can get into town, I can hire a sleigh and a team of horses at the livery stable to come out for my tent and belongings. What in the world will I do with Dino?"

"Bring him to our place," said Billy. "Dad's as good with horses as any veterinary I know of."

"That would be fine," said Selden, "but I've got to get into town today anyway. I should have gone last week, but I didn't expect the winter to come down on us like this."

Billy was thinking rapidly. There was nothing to do but let him have Lady Lightning. He had to adjust himself to that idea, however.

"I couldn't do a thing with Rayner," Selden went on. "I think he's ashamed to back down now, because he's been telling everybody that he's going to make Oscar Thornton pay those hospital bills. When he saw the snow, however, he agreed to have the trial postponed. He has a little cold and didn't like the idea of traveling that far on a sleigh. But you would have to go into Cassils and ask the judge for a postponement. I thought that maybe I would do that for you, but now that Dino is incapacitated, I don't know how I'm going to get in."

"You better take the white mare, Mr. Selden," said Billy.

Selden looked at him and laughed.

"I wouldn't do such a cruel thing to you, Billy."

"No," said Billy wrinkling his forehead, ashamed of his selfishness. "You go on an' take 'er. Gosh! All you're doin' for me. I'll lead Dino back home slowly, an' we'll keep 'im for you all winter, so we can hope t' have you come back next spring."

"Billy, that's wonderful of you," said Selden. "I'll be happy to pay for his keep."

"Don't you worry 'bout that," said Billy. "We better pay you first for what you've done for us."

"Well, it's too cold to argue that over out here, Billy. If you really don't mind my taking the white mare, I'll be back tomorrow evening. I'll take care of her—she'll have the nicest, cleanest stall in town."

"Kind o' be careful when you first get into town," said Billy, holding the reins while Selden mounted. "She's never been t' town, she might be scared."

"Don't worry about her, Billy," said Selden, "I'll take the best possible care of her, and I assure you I'll bring her back safe to you. When I get right into town, I'll dismount and lead her."

"Oh, I know you'll take care of 'er, Mr. Selden."

"Tell your father that he shouldn't worry. I'll try to have the trial postponed to spring if possible, and I really think, by that time, Rayner will come to his senses. If not, if you'll get a lawyer and have him bring out that story of Tom's plunging into the ice water, I'm sure the judge will throw the case out of court."

Billy thanked him for what he was going to do for

them, and Selden thanked him for what he was doing for him. All the way up to the prairies above, as long as Selden and the white mare were visible, he kept turning around and watching them go.

Up on the prairies above, Billy decided to turn off the Rayner road when he got to the Sullivan trail, even though it was a bit farther. As they trudged along, he salved his conscience by promising himself to let poor Dino rest whenever and as long as he wanted to.

Dino, however, was unmistakably eager to get to some warm stall, any warm stall, anywhere.

CHAPTER 13

The Ghost Mare Comes Back

To AVOID going through the Rayner farmyard, Billy had led the badly limping Dino over the Sullivan trail. Not having been used at all, that abandoned roadway was not broken out. Nobody but Billy ever used it. Where the prairie lowered down into hollows, the road was covered with the drifts which had piled up during the night. At each of these drifts, Dino would stop to rest and pant, and Billy, waiting for him, would stamp his feet in an effort to keep warm, urging him on as soon as he had the heart to do so.

It was near one o'clock in the afternoon before he wearily dragged the crippled horse into the Thornton farmyard. When his father examined Dino's knee, he said, "I don't know whether he'll ever be much good any more or not."

They put him into a warm stall and gave him plenty of oats and hay, then Oscar Thornton bandaged his swollen knee.

Billy ate a big lunch and sat down by the airtight heater at the farther end of the kitchen. He worried badly as he rested. Try as he would, he could not drive the fear out of his mind that something might happen to Selden on this trip. Lady Lightning had never been

to town before. She would be afraid of the trains, the many automobiles swishing through the snowy streets, children playing noisily, or dogs barking. He should not have let Selden take the mare. But he had been afraid that if he refused Selden would think it was because he was selfish, and wouldn't part with his saddle pony for a day. If anything happened to Selden, the ghost mare, of course, would be blamed again.

As he sat there dozing and fighting off his fears, his mother startled him by saying, "I need some wood, Billy. You better fill up the woodbox. Look's like something blowin' up."

Billy put on his outdoor clothes nervously. The possibility of a storm blowing up, while Selden and Lady Lightning were in town, intensified all his other worries.

When he got out to the woodpile, he looked up at the sky. The clouds were milky and flat. The sun, breaking through in the lower south, was flanked on either side by brassy reflections.

"Sun dogs!" muttered Billy.

He filled up his arms hastily and hurried back into the house.

"Dad!" he cried. "Gosh, there's sun dogs!"

By the time he had deposited his armful of wood in the woodbox and started back for another, his father had his outdoor clothes on and was following him.

Outdoors, the big farmer looked up silently into the sky. Billy waited breathlessly for him to speak.

"Think Selden'll know enough not to let himself start back in a blizzard?" asked Oscar Thornton, still looking.

"Of course!" cried Billy. "He's a city man, but he knows this country—besides, folks 'd tell 'im."

"Look's like a real whopper a-comin'," said his father, lumbering off to the barn.

When he had filled the woodbox with kitchen-stove wood and had laid more of these on the floor under the stove and in the corner behind it, he brought in many of the large chunks for the airtight heater, piling them up in the vestibule to the very ceiling.

That done, Billy went out to join his father in the barn. The cattle had to be watered and fed, their stalls bedded with clean straw, and the calves had to be tied so that, if the storm lasted several days, as such storms often do, they could not entangle themselves in moving around impatiently.

Each time Billy went out to the straw pile at the side of the barn to get straw for bedding, he stopped to study the sun dogs. They continued to glow feebly in the milky, muddy heavens. The wind appeared to have grown stronger, every time he came out, tearing most of the straw from his arms while he was carrying it into the barn.

By the time they were through with their chores, the sun dogs had vanished, and a winter night was rapidly descending on them. The skies had darkened all over the great dome, and across the lower, western half of it great black clouds like airships were speeding southward.

All through supper Billy's father and mother kept saying how bad the coming blizzard promised to be, recalling severe blizzards they had experienced in their time.

After supper, Billy got a book and sat down by the fire to read, but reading was impossible for him that night. His thoughts raced across his mind like the clouds across the sky. Finally, at nine o'clock, he laid his book aside. He hadn't the faintest idea of what he had been reading. Going out to look at the weather, he found the sky was clear and the wind had died down. He was so relieved, he went to bed and slept soundly through the night.

Next morning, the sun struggled to break through a gloomy, churning sky. There was a feeling in the atmosphere of pent-up, impending fury, but Billy hoped that the blizzard would not break for another day or two. If only it remained peaceful until Selden got back and Lady Lightning was safe in her stall!

By midmorning, however, great black clouds appeared above the horizon and moved upward, spreading slowly over the entire sky. When Billy went out to look again after lunch, the clouds had broken apart in the southwest sky, the sun was blinking through a milky white curtain, and there were the sun dogs again, leering at him ominously.

Billy stood there as if hypnotized by the brassy glow. Selden, he figured, would be back perhaps before the storm was at its worst, but what would he do with Lady Lightning? After that long trip from Cassils, he would be too weary and cold to go on for six miles more to their place. At the tent Lady Lightning would have to remain tied outside in the blizzard all night. In the wilds, free to move around, a horse can find some sort of shelter in a hollow or in the lee of a butte, or it can

keep warm by moving around. Tied up, she might be suffering all night.

Shortly after two o'clock, though the wind was steadily growing stronger, Billy put on his warmest clothes and announced that he was going to the canyon to get Lady Lightning.

"In this storm?" cried his mother.

"It isn't bad yet," said Billy. "If it gets too bad, I'll stay overnight with Mr. Selden."

"In that tent?" cried his mother.

Oscar Thornton in his stocking feet, by the stove, stood up.

"By this time," he said seriously, "that tent o' his is probably tore down. If Selden has any sense at all, he'll stay in town till the storm's over."

"He said he'd be back early."

"He wasn't countin' on any blizzard."

"I don't care," cried Billy, "I'm not goin' t' take a chance of leavin' the mare out in the open all night."

With that, Billy tore out of the house, but as he broke out of the vestibule, the blast took his breath away. He lowered his head, and went resolutely toward the barn.

He saddled Perry and led him through the barn, but when the pony got to the open doorway, he held back and protested. Billy was exasperated. He was nervous to the last degree anyway. As he jerked the reins impatiently in an effort to get Perry to go out, his father appeared.

"Billy, I can't let you go," said his father firmly. "It's bad enough a'ready, but it's goin' t' be a hummer; it's too dangerous."

"Dad, I got to go!" cried Billy.

"It gets dark by four o'clock," said his father. "It'll be dark even before you get t' Selden's."

"If it's very bad, I'll stay overnight with Selden."

"What's the use o' goin' then?" demanded his father. "The mare'll have t' stay out in the open—you can't take her into the tent with you."

"No, but she'll have Perry with her. Two horses warm each other, besides that's only a chance. I think I c'n come back all right."

As he said this, Billy saw his mother, all bundled up, waddling across the snow-blown yard toward them.

"Billy," she cried breathlessly, coming into the barn, "you ain't a-goin' in a storm like this."

"I am too goin', Mother, I must—"

"Must!" cried his mother, facing him with a fury that frightened him. "It's the durned ghost mare, that's what it is. She's a-lurin' you to your death. You go put that pony back in his stall. You ain't a man yet."

She turned on her husband.

"What you standin' there without the backbone t' tell your own son what he can't do," she cried.

"Well, Billy," said his father, taking hold of the reins dangling from Perry's bridle, "Mother's right. We have a right t' save you from such a dangerous notion. I ain't interfered with you much, but you can't go today."

Oscar Thornton took the saddle pony back to his stall, and Billy started out to the house, his mother waddling along behind him. In the house, while he was removing his outdoor clothes, she continued pleading with him.

"What good would it be t' you, savin' the white mare, if you lose your own life, doin' it?"

But Billy, half recognizing the justice of what she was saying, went up to his room. He intended to lock himself in and remain there for the rest of the day, but when it grew dark at three and the blasts tore at the house as if they meant to rip it apart, he realized that he had been unreasonable and came shame-facedly down into the living room. His mother, knowing his weakness for pumpkin pie, had three huge ones sitting on the work table, filling the air with their aroma.

"Jus' go out to the vestibule," said his father, looking up from his paper, "an' tell me if you think any man'd be sane, goin' out into a storm like this."

"With all those crazy ideas about the ghost mare," said Billy, sitting down on the other side of the heater with a book, "I guess it's better I didn't go. If anything happened that could happen anywhere, any time, with any horse, it'd be laid to the ghost mare."

"She'll be all right," said his father, going back to his paper. "She's used to blizzards an' the open prairie."

Billy said nothing. His mother offered him some pie, but he said he wasn't hungry. All through supper he said very little.

"I'm ashamed of you, Billy," said his mother when they were almost through with the meal, "sittin' an' poutin' like Tommy Rayner."

"You've never been that way," put in his father, smiling.

"I'm not poutin'," said Billy. "You think I wanted t' go for pleasure?"

"I don't know what you coulda' done," argued his father. "I'm sure Selden's got too much sense t' let 'imself go—a day like this."

"Depends on what time he left. Wasn't so bad in the morning."

"He had business t' do in town."

"If he left ten o'clock in the morning," insisted Billy, "he'd be back at his place by three."

"With these snowy roads?"

"You should go out an' see how it's snowin' right now," said his mother. "It's snowin' an' blowin' as if the world's comin' to an end."

After supper Billy sat down to read again. His mother was fussing around the stove, his father dozing on the other side of the heater, the blasts shaking the house with a cold rattling and creaking. Billy's eyes were on the page of his book, but his mind was out in the blizzard with Selden. He was seeing him struggling for life in the storm, the white mare like a ship at sea pushing along bravely against the overwhelming waves of wind and snow.

Oscar Thornton went to bed at nine, but Billy's mother said she wouldn't go to bed until Billy had gone.

"What are you afraid of?" demanded Billy. "I won't go now!"

"Why don't you go t' bed then," said his mother sympathetically. "By early morning, if the storm's let up, you c'n go an' see about 'im."

That struck Billy as a reasonable attitude. He put his book away and, bidding his mother good night, went up into his garret room.

It was bitterly cold up there. The coyote-skin rug near his bed was almost as cold to his bare feet as oil-cloth. But the huge pile of blankets and comforters on his bed was very promising, and Billy fairly tore his clothes off, blew out his lamp, and got under them. For a few minutes he shook and shivered, then as the heat of his body conquered the coldness and a cozy restfulness came over him, he began to think of Selden again.

How dreadful it would be if that fine man were lost! He knew that Lady Lightning could endure the storm, but so many things could happen to a man like Selden. His hands and feet could freeze. He might fall off the saddle. If he got down to attempt to put life back into his feet by walking, he might lose his hold on the mare. In such a storm it was almost impossible to hear anything above the roar of the wind.

He listened now. The wind wailed against the corners of the roof. The lashing of showers of snow on the house and the snow slithering down the slant of the roof was so steady that the blizzard roar was unbroken. Only the occasional snap of a frozen nailhead could break into it.

Billy was grateful to his mother for what she had said. He had feared that even next morning he would have to struggle with his parents before they'd let him go. Now he would hold her to her promise. He was dozing off with the thought that he might reach Selden, half frozen in his tent, at dawn in time to save his life when he thought he heard the piercing neigh of the wild mare.

It had been faint but so clear that he was quite certain it was not mere imagination. He sat up listening

until he became unendurably cold, then he lay back in his bed. It couldn't have been. She couldn't possibly neigh loud enough to be heard above the blizzard roar, even if she had come right under his window. She wouldn't come to the house anyway, he reasoned. She would come to the barn. He was just imagining things.

Nevertheless, he lay there listening for a long time, expecting to hear that neigh again, at any minute. Then he fell asleep.

He woke long before daylight. By the sound of the wind now, he was sure the storm had spent its greatest fury. It was still as dark as night, but he could feel that it was not far from daylight. These short winter days, daylight didn't come before eight o'clock.

He got down in his bare feet, and warming a hole in the thick frost on his window, he peered out into the night. He couldn't see very much, but he could tell that it was no longer snowing. It was the falling snow, he reflected, that makes a blizzard so terrible. The wind was still strong enough to lift showers of loose snow and send it in waves across the white prairie, but it wasn't half as strong as it had been during the middle of the night.

Billy dressed very quietly and stole down the stairway, thinking he might make his breakfast and go off before his parents were up, but he was surprised to find his mother already in the kitchen and the fire going in the cook stove.

"I bet you was up all night listenin', thinkin' I'd be goin' off t' look for Selden!" cried Billy reprovingly.

"Not all night," said his mother, starting breakfast, "but most of it, I can tell you."

"Gee, Mother," said Billy, putting his hand on her shoulder, "did you think I'd sneak out on you?"

"Oh, it wasn't that," said his mother. "I know you was worried about Selden. I didn't blame you any. I was just afraid o' losin' you."

"I wouldn'ta' been lost, Mother," said Billy. "I was born in this country. Mr. Selden ain't used to blizzards."

"Anybody'd likely be killed out in a blizzard like this."

"Wouldn't you feel bad, though, if you found out that if I'd 'a' gone off yesterday I mighta' saved his life?"

"I'd be too busy thinkin' you mighta' lost yours."

Billy got some warm water and washed himself.

"The storm's about over, don't you think?" he asked as he rubbed himself dry and watched his mother frying bacon.

"It's mighty bad yet."

Billy frowned slightly. He'd have to argue some more.

"Surely, you'll let me go now," he cried. "No tellin' how he got home if he did!"

"Well," said his mother, "it's not so dangerous now. The wind's died down and it ain't snowin' no more. It'll be daylight soon."

Billy was agreeably surprised and very grateful. He hurried through his breakfast as fast as his mother would let him; then he proceeded to dress warmly enough to suit her. He put on his woolen socks, felt boots, arctics, and heavy sheepskin coat, then lowering the ear tabs of his fur cap, he allowed his mother to wind a heavy woolen muffler around his neck. She

kept advising him on what to do and what not to do until the noise of the wind, when he opened the outside door, swept her words out of hearing.

Billy plowed through the snow anxiously. He was not only eager to be on his way, but he was afraid his mother might detain him with further admonitions. As he got to the center of the space between house and barn, he was startled by something moving at the side of the strawstack. A part of the snow-covered strawstack seemed to break away and come toward the barn.

It was Lady Lightning! Her saddle was hanging on her side, slipped over and down to her flanks.

Billy was horrified. So it had been her neigh he had heard on going to bed last night!

He rolled the barn door to the side, let the mare into the barn, then without taking time to examine her, grabbed a pitchfork and tore out breathlessly to the straw pile.

On the south side of the stack, Billy saw a hole in the straw. She had burrowed into it and made herself a warm nest. But though he probed all around the straw and in the snowdrifts, he could find nothing to indicate that Selden had been with her when she had returned.

He plowed his way through the drifts back to the barn. The thought that Selden might be dead was unendurable. Billy tried to convince himself that Selden could have gotten home even though Lady Lightning had returned as she did. Selden might even have tied her to the tent ropes, and she might have gotten loose in the blizzard night.

At the barn doorway he saw that his father was coming from the house. He had hoped to get away without

telling his parents of the mare's return until he had found out what had really happened.

"Lady Lightning's here!" cried Billy, the wind stinging his face. "She was in the strawstack all night."

"No sign of Selden?" shouted Oscar Thornton.

"I'm sure she came alone," said Billy, shutting the barn door after his father had come in. "I've looked all around. You look a bit more, will you? I'm goin' down to the canyon."

His father seemed overcome. Billy hurried off to the white mare's stall, and he followed him silently.

"It may be that Mr. Selden got home to his tent," he was saying as he went, "an' tied her up—he had nowhere t' keep her—an' she wasn't goin' t' stay out all night—"

He stopped when he got to the stall and rushed at the white mare's head to see if there was any rope dangling from her or her reins were broken, to indicate that Selden had tied her up, but his heart fell. The reins were up where they belonged, tied to the saddle horn. Selden had fallen off somewhere along the road.

"If he'da' been all right," said his father, examining the bridle with him, "he wouldn'ta' let her go like this. He's fallen off somewhere."

"That doesn't have t' be!" cried Billy with an impatience that was almost anger. "He coulda' got down t' get into his tent. His hands cold—while he fussed with the tent flaps, she coulda' walked away."

"Maybe," said Oscar Thornton, none too hopefully.

Lady Lightning appeared to have fared perfectly in her nest in the strawstack. Her entire body was warm

and dry, and while she seemed to be eager for oats, her distended sides indicated that she had eaten into the strawstack rather than burrowed. Billy had no compunctions about making her go on a trip again. It was an emergency, and she was far better able to cope with the deep snows than Perry.

He straightened the saddle on her back and led her out. His father watched him but said nothing. When Billy mounted, he said, "Keep to the road, Billy, an' don't go too far. Later in the day, I'll take Perry an' go out an' help you look. He may be in his tent, or he may be in any farm home along the way."

There were a few clouds sailing by in the lower skies, but the main dome glowed with clear cold stars. The wind was still cruelly penetrating, but it was not half as strong as it had been. Only when it picked up a mass of loose snow and hurled it on them was it painfully disagreeable. The road was covered deep in snow, but to Billy, who had traveled it nearly every day of his life, there was no difficulty making it out under its thick white blanket. Lady Lightning seemed to feel the ruts of it under her hoofs. When they turned directly south and the wind was blowing against their backs, the going became a bit easier, and the white mare fell into a steady laborious gait.

Daylight was coming, but it was still very faint. The Rayner farmyard looked like a body asleep under a heavy white comforter. Only the windmill and the chimney above the house looked as if they were made of anything but snow. The house was almost completely buried, and as Billy plowed through the yard, he was glad to see that the Rayners hadn't gotten up yet.

It was bitterly cold, as it so often is after a blizzard, and in spite of his warm clothes, Billy was beginning to realize that his search was going to be a difficult one. He centered all his thoughts on the hope of finding Selden in his tent. If Selden were not home, he figured, even though he tried desperately to evade the thought, he would have to go into the tent and build a fire before he went on searching for him. It would be best to search in broad daylight, and even if the day remained a cold one, it would be sure to be less bitter after the sun had arisen.

He was alarmed by the extent to which he was uncomfortably cold by the time he got to the canyon. The upper half of the slope was easy for Lady Lightning, the winds having swept it comparatively free of snow. But along the lower part of it, the drifts were so deep, Billy dismounted to allow the white mare to plow through them without the burden of his weight on her back.

The canyon bottom was less deep in snow, but when he turned along the river shore, toward Selden's tent, the wind struck down from the north, right into the side of his face. His right eye began to water, and the tears froze at once. He was obliged to remount, though he would have preferred to walk farther. Lady Lightning kept her head lowered and turned slightly away from the wind as she pushed ahead.

As he approached the area of the tent, Billy became more and more anxious to look. His eyes exasperated him. The frost had all but blinded him. But he soon found more to worry about than that.

He didn't need to do much seeing to realize how

completely the blizzard had wrecked Selden's tent. The fly, ripped off at three of its corners, was still flapping in shreds from the fourth. The tent roof was torn apart in two places, and the inside of the tent was packed tight with snow.

In his desperation, Billy wanted to turn around and go searching toward Cassils, inquire along the road from farmers with whom Selden might possibly have taken shelter. But his eyes were so bad and he was so dangerously cold all over that he decided, much as he chafed against the delay, to go to the Sailor shanty, build a fire, and get himself into the condition necessary for the day's search. As the day advanced and the sun rose higher, the temperature would rise, and the wind might possibly die down altogether.

All the way to the trail, Billy felt as if the elements, the wind and snow, the dark thoughts of superstition that he had never completely cleared out of his mind, the white mare, and all the forces of life had combined to thwart his every plan, to destroy him and those he loved. His nerves strained to the utmost, in spite of the feeble efforts of his mind to reason the way Selden had urged him to reason, he experienced a feeling of revulsion against the white mare. Yet he knew that he was absolutely helpless in the cold blast without her.

When she turned faithfully along the trail to the shanty and faced the north wind, he had all he could do to hang on to the saddle. This was the first time since leaving his own farmyard that he had had to face the gale, and he felt as if he had been caught by a dreadful treachery. He hadn't really known how bad that blast

was. He could breathe only by protecting his face with both his hands, and when he did so, he was afraid he couldn't hang on to the saddle with his half-numb legs.

Then he came to the foot of the slope where the drifts were piled mountain high. In a few minutes the white mare was stuck deep in snow, up to her belly, and she stopped. Fortunately that made it easier for him to dismount, and numb though his feet were, Billy managed to lift his left leg back over the saddle.

As soon as he had dismounted, the white mare pulled herself out of the drift. Billy had a terrible time, trying to keep up with her, because she could manage the drifts better by jumping. But all this forced action put life back into his limbs.

On the prairies above, he turned Lady Lightning around and let her rest a few minutes with her back to the blast; then he remounted.

The Sailor shanty was anything but inviting. Its south wall seemed comparatively free from snow, but its little windows were opaque with frost, and he could see in the one or two glimpses he allowed himself that on the north side of the shanty the snowdrift was so great that it reached to the very peak of the roof.

Billy turned the white mare toward the dilapidated little barn fifty feet to the side. Its broken door was torn off at one hinge and thrown sideways against the door frame. Through the opening, the winds had driven a drift of snow halfway across the interior of the barn.

His hands were numb, but he caught the edge of the door with his wrists and pulled it back. As soon as he

had it half open, the mare squeezed eagerly into the barn. The saddle stirrup almost pulled the door out of his grasp.

Billy pushed his own way into the little cave. In the darkness inside, he stood knee deep in the drift that had blown in and tried to see where Lady Lightning had gone. She had chosen the stall farthest away from the half-open door.

Billy had no way of knowing how much rest or food Lady Lightning had had the day before. There was a long and laborious day of search ahead of her. He looked about to find something he might give her to eat.

The rats and the gophers had carried away most of the oats in Bob Sailor's oats bin, but there was still enough left on the bottom for a good meal, and Billy gathered it up. There was also a pile of hay in one corner of the barn, and he carried a few armfuls to her.

It seemed to him by the time he started for the shanty that the wind had subsided slightly. Just having warmed up a bit feeding the mare, he thought, might make it seem so. In fact, if it had not been for the feeling that Lady Lightning should have her breakfast, he would have preferred to go right on and search for Selden. He was not going into that shanty anticipating any pleasure.

He tore at the latch with his gloved hands and looked about for something with which to force it open. It seemed frozen to. But there was nothing but snow anywhere. As he pulled and pushed, the wind swept around the shanty and slapped snow dust into

his eyes. Then when he had the door open at last, the wind tore it from him and banged it against the wall. He got hold of it again and stepping into the shanty pulled it shut on himself, but as he did so he was taken by the feeling that someone was in the room.

He whirled around, so frightened he almost yelled out. The place was cold and musty and dark, the windows covered thick with frost. He was sure that this feeling that someone was there was merely the result of his superstitious fears, but when he tore the fur cap from his head, he saw something move on the bed.

“Who’s there?” he cried.

“Billy!” It was unmistakably Ina’s voice.

For a second, Billy thought he had lost his mind. He quickly wiped his eyes with his bare hand, and facing the shadow on the bed, he called out shakily, “Ina! What you doin’ here?”

“I’m so wound up in these quilts,” said Ina with a feeble laugh, “I’m helpless.”

Billy approached her as if he were afraid of her.

Ina peered out at him.

“I’m not a ghost, Billy!”

Billy smiled shamefacedly.

“I can’t believe it!” he said. “How’d you get here?”

“I arrived last night in the blizzard,” said Ina, free enough now to sit up on the edge of the bed. “I came by way of Lady Lightning.”

“You?”

“Yes! Did Lady Lightning get home?”

“Yah!” cried Billy, his voice still ringing with awe.

“Oh, I’m so happy!” muttered Ina, and Billy knew

she was crying. "I was worried sick over her. I was afraid I had lost her for you. I know how much she means to you."

"Gosh!" cried Billy. "I'm glad you're safe! Where's Selden?"

"Mr. Selden said he'd come out with a team of horses and a sleigh that he hired, so he could get his tent and things. You don't mind his letting me take the white mare, do you, Billy?"

"Course not. I asked you to take her f'r's long as you like, didn't I?"

"Mr. Selden wrote to me and told me all about Dad's silly trial. I didn't like the idea of testifying against my father—he's really a good man, Billy—but I just packed my things an' came down to Cassils on the early morning train. I got in about eleven. Siegert had already started back here with his mail stage. Selden told me that he had had the trial postponed, but I didn't want to hang around Cassils for another day, so I asked Mr. Selden to let me take Lady Lightning. He didn't want to let me, but I threatened to hire a saddle pony, so he let me take her.

"I tell you that in all my life I never experienced such a terrible blizzard. And I've been out in a dozen of them. When I reached that hill—you remember it, Billy—that hill about ten miles south of the canyon—remember you and I stopped there last year and counted grain wagons?"

"You bet I remember."

"Well when I got there, I thought the world was coming to an end—I thought that north wind would carry me and Lady Lightning back down into the val-

ley again. Dear old Lady, she just lowered that lovely head of hers, and she pushed right into it. By the time we got to the canyon—well, I was just about a goner. I didn't know where I was, and it wouldn't have mattered if I had. I had neither hands nor feet, all I could do was just to hang on to life." She laughed. "I just told myself I mustn't die. I must get home. I must talk to Dad. I must take care of Billy's saddle pony. Oh, it was dreadful. When she came to this shanty door, I thought I was already dead. How I got off, how I ever opened this door, *how I lived through this night—*"

"Shucks, Ina," cried Billy. "It's awful cold. I'll build a fire."

"In the dark I couldn't find matches. I am not even sure what happened, Billy; I think I fainted and was unconscious on the floor for some time. I know I felt awful sick when I got up on my feet—I felt as if I was walking on my shin bones—couldn't feel my feet. I just got into bed with all my clothes on."

"Gosh, Ina, your feet frozen!"

Billy was so flustered, he hardly knew what he was doing.

"I don't think so, Billy. I'm all right."

"A fire!" cried Billy. "Shucks!"

He scratched his wet hair and looked around helplessly. He couldn't think straight. He knew where the matches were; of course, he did. He went right to the baking-powder can in which Bob had kept his matches on the shelves back of the stovepipe. But as he fumbled with the tin can, wondering why he himself had covered it so tight the last time he had been there, he saw that the woodbox was completely empty.

"What made you come here, Billy?" asked Ina.

She had gotten off the bed. She still had on all her outdoor clothes. With one of the quilts thrown like a shawl around her shoulders, she sat down on the rocker not far from the stove.

Billy told her in brief snatches how he had come upon the mare, how he had hurried away to see whether Selden had reached the tent, how he had found the tent, and why he had come to the shanty.

"Lady Lightning's in the barn here, then?"

"Yes."

"Oh, good; I'll see her."

"I got t' build a fire!" he cried, scratching his head helplessly.

"No wood," said Ina. "I got off the bed as soon as there was the faintest light at dawn, but there was no wood in the woodbox. I got back into bed, but I couldn't make myself comfortable again."

There was a large hatchet standing back of the woodbox against the wall. Billy seized it, and moving the woodbox out to the center of the room, he began breaking it up into stovewood lengths.

"Billy!" cried Ina.

"I'll build another woodbox for Bob if he thinks he needs it, an' bring it here."

Ina laughed.

"I was afraid all night long that Bob was going to come and visit me while I was here."

"Were you really?" asked Billy, stopping his work and looking at her a moment.

"It's an awful feeling, Billy," said Ina. "I'm not superstitious, but here I was, alone, cold, sick, I could

hardly think straight. But nothing happened. No one came but the wind—and you—I'm awfully glad it was you, Billy."

"Gosh!" cried Billy, laying out the wood and shavings. "If I'd 'a' known, I'd 'a' come down here."

"I'm glad you didn't try; you'd never have gotten here."

"You know," said Billy, lighting his fire, "a fellow tries t' fight off these crazy superstitious ideas. Sometimes, though, he fights off what's true, what he really hears. I thought when I heard Lady Lightning neighin' there in that roar, I was just hearin' things—"

"She went to call you, Billy."

"I guess maybe, when she called me, she had that heart of hers set on a warm stall an' some oats an' hay."

"No, Billy, she went to call you, I know she did. Any-way, she certainly saved my life. She's an angel, that lovely white thing, the way she pushed along so faithfully in that awful blizzard. She could easily have dumped me into the snow and made it easier for herself. And the way she came right up to the door here, Billy! If that wasn't telling me to go into shelter, what was it? Just imagine her standing so patiently, the wind and the snow lashing at us, waiting for me to get off. How long it was before I caught on that she had brought me to a house, before I was able to slide off that saddle, I don't know, but she never stirred until I was inside."

Billy smiled. He took the kettle from the stove and went out to get some snow. As he was packing the snow into it, at the drift that lay against the corner of the shanty, he thought, It's lettin' up fast. The wind's not

half as bad as it was when I got here. *An' George Selden's safe! I don't have t' go lookin' for 'im. Jimminy! Am I happy.*

When he re-entered, shutting the door, he leaned back against it and smiled. A cozier sight could not have been wished for. The stove lids were becoming red hot. The windows had melted halfway down, and the sunlight reflected from the snows poured into the cabin. He set the kettle on the stove to melt the snow and boil some water for coffee.

"A warm drink'll make us feel good inside, too," he said, gathering the things he would need for his coffee, setting cups at the table. Ina had thrown back the quilt from her shoulders and removed her woolen helmet and her fur-lined coat. She was taking off her boots.

"Isn't it a blessing that my folks don't know I'm here," she said. "Dad would have a stroke. You suppose anybody could possibly have come out from town already?"

"Oh, they could," said Billy cautiously. "But nobody would unless they just had to."

"Just the same, Billy, I must get home as soon as possible."

"Soon's we've had our coffee, Ina—your things dry?"

Ina looked at her boots. She was in her stocking feet. Billy took her boots and set them down where they would dry thoroughly on the hearth of the stove. Then he walked to the tall, homemade dresserlike set of drawers that Bob had at the foot of the bed. Rummaging through one of the drawers, he found two pairs of heavy, gray knitted woolen socks.

"You c'n put these two pairs o' socks right over your boots," he said.

Ina laughed.

"Won't they look pretty?"

"You're lookin' pretty enough, Ina."

"You don't expect me to walk four or five miles through deep snow with those things on my feet!"

"No, I don't," said Billy. "You're not goin' t'walk. Lady Lightning 'd be insulted, if you wouldn't let her finish the job, now that she has brought you this far."

"And you walk?"

"Sure! My feet aren't frozen."

"Neither are mine."

"I'm hungry!" cried Billy. "I'm goin' t' find something to eat."

He pulled up the cellar door, which was cut out of the floor near the table. The cellar was just a hole in the ground, under the shanty. There was a smell of rotted vegetables from a corner, where several bags of potatoes and onions and things were standing, but to the side of the ladderlike stairway, he saw a shelf against a beam and on it a dozen or so cans of various kinds of food. Stepping down to the second rung below the floor, he reached toward it and got a large can of baked beans and a can of preserved peaches.

"Poor Bob Sailor," said Ina, when he reshut the cellar door.

"He wouldn't mind, Ina."

"I know he wouldn't," said Ina. "I'm just thinking—"

"You know how to cook these beans?"

"You don't have to cook them; let me have the can."

Billy put the last of the woodbox into the stove and watched her. She took a skillet hanging back of the stove, and while Billy opened both tins, she put the beans into the skillet and proceeded to warm them. Billy served the peaches in little sauce dishes, then he turned around and looked at Ina. She was stirring the beans in the skillet. Her lovely hair was tousled, one curly strand hanging over her eye, and she was standing in her stocking feet. It seemed to him that she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

"Let's you an' I get married an' move in here, Ina," he cried impulsively with a smile. "This is lots o' fun!"

"Billy!" cried Ina, blushing. "I've got to go to school yet. And you should, too."

"I bet school isn't as much fun as this," he teased.

"No, but you can't live on fun, Billy."

"You like t' go t' school in Calgary?"

"Yes, I do. I like it very much. It's a much better school than I've ever gone to. But—"

"But what?"

"Well, I do get kind o' lonesome for the folks at home and all my friends out here. I'm not crazy about the noise and hurry in the city."

The beans were ready, and Ina served them on two plates, while Billy served the coffee.

"I've lost all interest in school," said Billy when they sat down to eat.

"That's too bad, Billy," said Ina. "Tom wrote me you weren't going. Because you're not going, he doesn't want to go. I tried to get Dad to send Tom to school with me, but I guess he can't bear to have both Tom

and me away from home. Why don't you come to Calgary, Billy? You could find work as well as I did."

"Your Dad'd make you come home soon's he heard I was there."

"I'm going to have all that out with Dad when I get home," said Ina. "Let's clean up the dishes an' go."

They washed the dishes and talked as they did so. They straightened the room, setting everything back into place carefully, but stopped at the stove and talked some more. Again and again, Ina said she must go, but she lingered, as reluctant to go as Billy was. Finally, she pulled Bob's woolen socks, one pair over the other, over her boots, as Billy insisted. They bundled up as securely as they could, and Billy went out to get the white mare.

He led Lady Lightning right up to the open doorway so that Ina could mount from the doorsill without having to step into the snow. While she adjusted herself in the saddle, Billy took a last look into Bob's shanty before shutting the door. He had had many happy moments there, he thought, but this had been the happiest.

"You wouldn't let me step into the snow, Billy," cried Ina when he took hold of the reins and led Lady Lightning away, "and I didn't get a chance to hug her old neck, and kiss her dear old muzzle."

Billy smiled and plunged forward into the drifts on a straight line south, toward the snow-packed canyon.

CHAPTER 14

Lady Lightning Triumphs

IT TOOK Billy half an hour to make the one quarter of a mile from the Sailor shanty to the rim of the canyon, so deep was the snow piled along the trail. Time after time, Ina called to him from her seat on the saddle, begging him to let her struggle with the snow a bit, so he could take her place on the saddle, but he refused. Before he got to the canyon, he was wet with perspiration, and he argued that if he sat still in the saddle he would take cold.

The huge drifts gathered at the foot of the slope were, of course, even worse, but there were only some two hundred feet of these deep drifts. The rest of the level bottom of the canyon made easier going. Along the shore of the river, the snow was not very deep, and what the winds failed to sweep from there on to the frozen surface of the river, they had polished into a hardness that held Billy up.

At Selden's tent they stopped a moment. The fly had now been ripped away completely, and further drifting of snow on the north side had almost completely covered it.

"Poor Mr. Selden," shouted Ina. "Do you suppose his things are ruined?"

"I don't think so," Billy told her. "The snow's dry. If he gets everything out before the snow gets wet, his things'll be all right."

Billy was delighted, on getting to the roadway, to find that the road had been well broken. It looked as if several teams of horses with sleighs had gone over it in both directions. When they came to it, Billy dropped into one of the ruts, and Lady Lightning took the other.

Walking along the rut was hard enough, as the sleigh runners had not gone all the way through to the ground. But it was easier for Billy than it had been where the drifts had been wholly unbroken.

"This road worries me," said Ina. "It looks as if a lot of people have come out of town already. Somebody might have told my folks that I left Cassils yesterday. They'll be worried to death."

"I don't think anybody's come out o' town yet," said Billy, trying to reassure her. "These tracks've been made by folks right around here."

When they came once more to the canyon slope, they found the drifts at the bottom as deep as they had been where the Sailor trail drops into the canyon. Here the drifts had been broken a bit by the sleighs that had gone over them, but they were still very deep, and both Billy and Lady Lightning had to struggle to extricate themselves every few feet of their way. Up on the prairie above, the road was better than it had been at any time. While it was still impossible to do more than creep along, Billy was able to retain enough breath to talk as he walked along.

They had gone about a mile and a half when coming

to the top of a knoll Billy saw a rider on horseback in the hollow before him. The sun was shining on the snow. The glaring whiteness strained his eyes, but he soon recognized his own pony Perry. His father was coming, as he had promised, to help him look for Selden. He explained all that to Ina, and they laughed about it.

But when Oscar Thornton was near enough to see them clearly, he forced his pony into an excited lope toward them. A few feet away, the farmer slid from his saddle, and too excited to talk calmly, he cried, "Ina Rayner, for heaven's sakes, get on home as soon as ever you can, girl! Mr. Selden's come out o' town, an' he's told your father you came home on the white mare. Selden came tearin' up t' my place, an' when I told 'im the mare'd come home in the night, he went back an' told your father. Your father thinks you're dead, an', an'—you better just go on's fast as ever you can."

Ina looked down at Billy. Billy quickly gave her the reins, and without a word, she struck at the white mare's flanks with her heels urging her into a lope. Billy stood there and looked after her, and though the mare couldn't gallop very fast, she left them far behind and moved off in a cloud of snow dust.

"You take the pony, an' let me walk," said Oscar Thornton, as Billy started on.

"No, Dad," said Billy. "I'm wet from head t' foot. If I sit in the saddle, I'll take cold."

Oscar Thornton reined Perry into the rut beside Billy.

"I believe John's goin' t' have a stroke. He's all broke up over it. I was a-sittin' on horseback in the

yard. We was makin' up a posse t' go look for Ina's body along the road. Mr. Selden, he laid into him. John, he was screechin' about the damned ghost mare. Selden said to 'im, says he, 'You're t' blame for Ina's death.' Gee! He laid it to him. John, he got so sick, I thought he was goin' t' drop in the snow. They had t' help 'im into the house. I said I'd go on an' meet you, an' I'd join them as they come along. And then I came onto you."

In spite of the difficulty of galloping in such deep snows, Ina got so far ahead of them that they lost sight of her. When they finally came within sight of the Rayner farmyard, Billy saw several horses tied to the fence posts along the east side of the yard.

"They've all gone into the house now with Ina," said Oscar Thornton peering intently ahead.

"If the snow wasn't so deep," said Billy starting on again beside his father on horseback, "I'd turn off here on this old Sullivan trail. I don't care t' go through their yard, all those people around."

"Fiddlesticks!" cried Oscar Thornton. "The road's public property. Besides, what about the mare? You got t' get the mare."

"Ina'd like to keep her while she's here."

"John won't have 'er on the place."

"He'll be so glad t' have his daughter back, he'll forget about that."

"You come along," said Oscar, still peering ahead, "this road's yours as much as Rayner's."

When they got within a few yards of the house, Billy's heart began to thump. He peered ahead and just lumbered along. He was almost exhausted now.

The Rayner dog rent the air with his barking.

"Turk's so excited with all the goin's on, he's near crazy," said Billy's father.

"He keeps on barkin' like that, *he'll* have a stroke."

Oscar laughed.

Suddenly Billy saw Tom come tearing out of the house. He hurried toward Billy. He was smiling, but when he tried to talk, he faltered.

"Come into the house, Billy," he begged, taking Billy by the arm.

"Gosh, Tom," said Billy, "I'm wet from head t' foot. I better go on home an' get dry clothes on."

By that time, John Rayner came out, and Ina was hanging on to his arm. John's face was drawn and pale. Ina still had on Bob Sailor's woolen socks over her boots.

"I want t' thank you, Billy," said Rayner, reaching out with both his hands for Billy's.

He was unable to say anything further for a moment, but he got hold of himself and turned to Billy's father.

"Come in the house, Oscar, and have a warm drink."

"Thanks, John," said Oscar, "I'd sure like to. But Sarah, she's worryin' herself sick, back home, over what's happened to Ina. I jus' better go home an' tell her. Billy, here, c'n stay. He's wet from head t' foot, walkin' in the snow."

"Tom," cried Rayner. "Take Billy in. Give 'im some o' your dry clothes."

"Go ahead now, Billy," cried Oscar. "You're liable t' get pneumonia."

"Get Sarah, Oscar," said Rayner, Ina still clinging

to his arm, "an' bring 'er back here. We'll have supper t'gether—everybody's gone through such a time!"

"All right, John. I'll be glad t' do that."

Oscar started off on Perry, and Ina let go her hold on her father's arm and ran to join Tom and Billy. The boys were talking rapidly and kicking the snow off their boots beside the door.

"What 'd you do with Lady Lightning?" asked Billy, turning to Ina.

"Tom took her into the barn."

"I gave her the best stall in the place," said Tom. "Took her saddle off an' covered her with a warm blanket. Gave 'er so much oats, I hope she don't get sick."

"She's smart enough to stop, when she's had enough," said Billy earnestly.

"But I wanted to give her a mess of carrots," said Ina. "She won't be able to enjoy them now—you filling her up with oats."

"Billy can bring her over here again tomorrow," Tom shot back.

John Rayner came into the woodshed, rubbing his hands.

"What are you all hanging out here for?" he said. "Get into the house where it's warm."

He opened the door from the woodshed into the kitchen. Billy caught a whiff of the warm, delightful atmosphere of the Rayner house which he had been shut out of for months. The nickle trimmings of the huge kitchen stove shone with the radiance of the happy home. In a corner Dale Sorey, Wilber Steele, and Pete Striker were standing with cups of coffee in

their hands listening to George Selden. Selden immediately broke away from them and came over to Billy.

"Am I glad to see you, young fellow!" he said, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"Gosh! I sure am glad t' see you."

"How are you?"

"I'm all right," said Billy. "Nothin' wrong with me."

"I don't think so either," laughed Selden. "How's Dino?"

"He'll be all right, I think," said Billy, "time you need 'im again next spring."

"Tell me, Billy," cried Selden as if he had hardly heard what Billy had said. "Did I do the right thing, letting this young lady have a saddle pony that did not belong to me?"

"I told Ina weeks ago," said Billy, "she could have Lady Lightning any time she wanted her."

"Good," said Selden. "That's a heavy burden off my mind. I shouldn't have let this girl go on a day like that, but even some of the old-timers here told me that they hadn't expected such a bad blizzard so early in the year. This is only October."

"You're not very far from the Arctic, brother!" shouted Pete Striker, removing his pipe to speak.

"If that had been any other saddle pony," said Ina as she pulled off one of Bob's woolen socks from over her boot, "I wouldn't be here to tell you about it. The way she went right to the shanty door like that saved my life and shows how smart she is. I couldn't have lived through another hour of that dreadful blizzard if she'd

gone on to Thorntons'. If anybody ever calls her a ghost mare again or says she's bad luck, I'll—"

"Nobody's going to call her ghost mare when I'm around," interrupted John Rayner.

"For heaven's sake, stop talking about it," said Ina's mother, rolling a pie crust at the work table. "It makes me shiver to think of you out there in that awful storm."

Billy was holding his hands over the stove, rubbing them together to get the numbness out of his fingers. He was thinking of all that had happened since his capture of the wild mare, of Ina and himself and their promising future. He visualized the white mare in her comfortable stall out in the barn, and his face broke into a smile.

"You sure won out, Lady Lightning," he said to himself. "You sure won out!"



Perr Crowell



N.L.C./B.N.C.



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